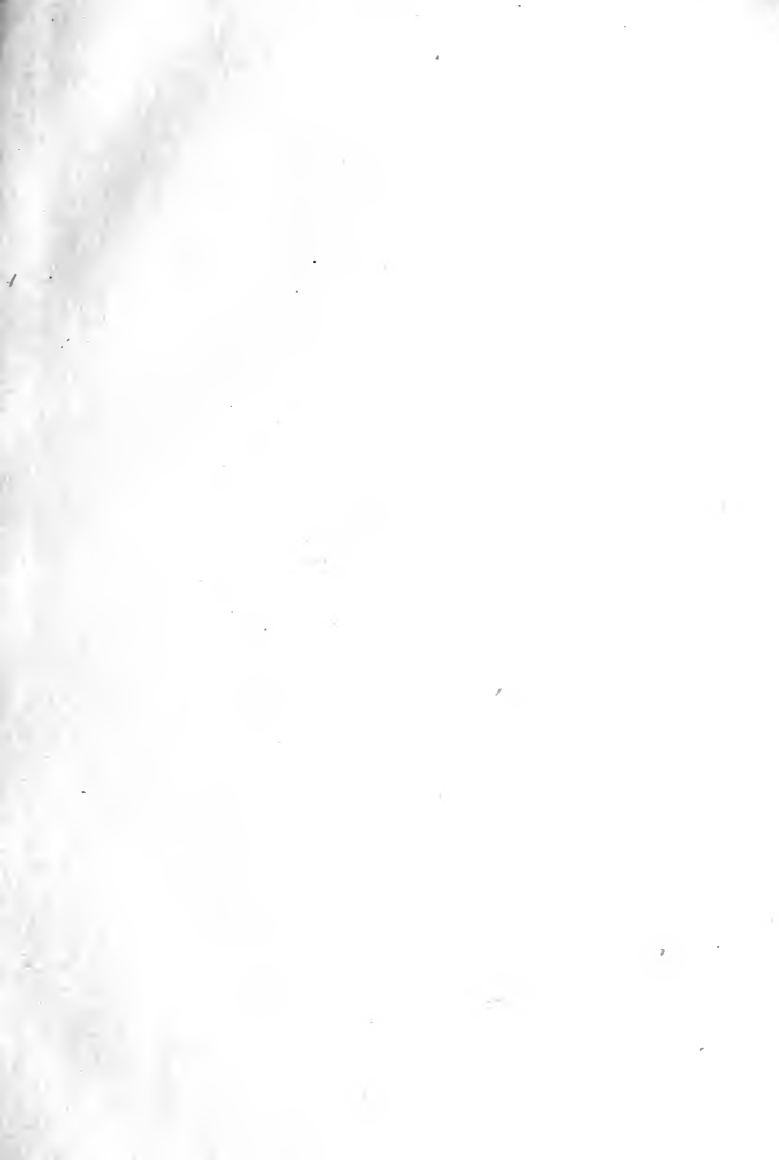


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McCartwright.

THE SPORT OF CHANCE.

VOL. III.



THE SPORT OF CHANCE

BY

WILLIAM SHARP

“Hither and thither blown, the sport of Chance.”

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

LONDON :

HURST AND BLACKETT, LIMITED,

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THE THIRD VOLUME.

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BOOK THE THIRD.

(CONTINUED.)

THE SPORT OF CHANCE.

CHAPTER V.

A STRANGE ADVENT.

As soon as the last guest, save Dr. Steele, had taken his departure, the latter accompanied Sir John into the studio. Opening a cabinet, the latter took from it a small locket with a monogram on its front, curiously worked in pearls.

‘This, Lady Ramsay and I found in the small tin box I told you of; the jewels and the papers are in the strong-room of my bank, but I kept this locket out for reasons you will afterwards easily understand. Can you make out the monogram formed by these pearls?’

‘It is not very difficult to make out two let-

ters, but whether the A or M comes first it is not easy to say. To me it looks like M. A.'

Sir John opened it, and watched to see the effect it would have on Dr. Steele. He feared that after all his speculations would crumble away like most other aerial castles. But the effect was instantaneous and convincing.

'It is Hew Armitage himself, and none other! I would know him among a thousand. The likeness is admirable, and has not only caught certain distinctive features, but has also an expression very characteristic of my poor friend's face in repose. Ah, I see! here are the letters "H. A." opposite; but I didn't need these to refresh my memory.'

'Now, what would you advise me to do next?'

'I should certainly recommend you to take the responsibility of urging Lora to open the papers at once. I think I can solve the mystery beforehand. I will give you now a brief account of the sad story, and I think you will come to the same conclusion as myself.'

In a short space of time, Dr. Steele recounted

the main features of the story of Hew and Mona Armitage, laying special stress on the monomania that had taken possession of the latter.

At the end of his short but impressive narrative, Sir John cried out,

‘I see it all. Poor Mrs. Armitage feared that if her husband could get hold of their daughter any time before she was of age he might be able to wreak her some great harm, perhaps even kill her. So she took all these precautions. Possibly there is some unmistakable declaration in the papers in the bank.’

‘I hope so; otherwise the task of proving Lora Cameron to be Lora Armitage will be very difficult indeed.’

‘Well, I shall urge Lora to open the packet to-morrow. If there should no longer be any doubt about her parentage, she will want to see you and hear as much as she can from your lips, for you saw more of her father and mother than anyone now living. Will you come in to-morrow evening in preparation for this?’

Having acquiesced, Dr. Steele took his departure, and Sir John went up to his wife’s room

and told her all that had happened. Both felt quite excited, and looked forward eagerly to perusing the contents of the packet.

Next day Sir John, in the presence of one of the officials of the bank, withdrew the packet from the tin box, and took it home with him to Grant Square.

Lora did not return home till late in the afternoon, having been on a long visit to Mrs. Octavia Stuart, the sister of Sir John, and one of the leading Scottish sculptors, as well as a woman of exceptionally fine mental and spiritual qualities. Lora Cameron and Mrs. Stuart, despite the difference in their age, had become fast friends, each sincerely admiring the other, and each finding refreshment and strength in this new friendship.

The servant who opened the door to her asked her to go at once to Sir John's studio.

‘Did you want me?’ she inquired, as, looking in at the door, she saw Lady Ramsay and her husband in earnest conversation.

‘Come here, Lora dear,’ exclaimed the latter; ‘we want to speak to you.’

‘Lora, the time has come when we think it highly advisable that you should open this packet. If no clue to the mystery that has always surrounded your parentage had turned up, we would have advised you to let things take their course, but a clue has been found. In the box you received from Mrs. McIan we found a small locket containing two sets of initials—this was the first clue; then Dr. Steele afforded us a second; and, lastly, through a well-known private-inquiry office we gained confirmatory information. I have to-day brought the packet from the bank, and, unless you are strongly opposed thereto, I should emphatically counsel you to open it now.’

Lora took the small parcel in her hand, but grew so white with mingled apprehension and excitement that Lady Ramsay put her arm round her, and, kissing her, whispered that she need have no fear of anything painful, for they already knew all that could be told.

Giving a grateful look to her friend, Lora opened the packet, and handed the enclosed letter to Sir John, with a request that he would

read it to her. It was inscribed 'To Mrs. Mary M'Ian, to be kept by her for Miss Lora Cameron till the latter is of age : but to be given to Miss Lora Cameron in the event of Mrs. M'Ian's death.' Beneath this again was another wrapper in a different handwriting, a weak and tremulous one, with some words that Sir John did not read out, but which were to the effect that the packet was on no account to be opened by Lora before her twenty-first birthday, save on the event of her antecedent marriage. Enclosed within this was a letter, a shorter one than Sir John had hoped to find ; but as he saw at a glance, confirmatory of his hopes, at the bottom of the page were the words, 'Mona Armitage,' and, opposite the signature, those of two witnesses.

Sir John read as follows :

'I, Mona Cameron Armitage, wife of Hew Armitage of Firnie Knowe, Forfarshire, knowing that my days are numbered, but being in my right mind, do hereby make this solemn declaration : that the child I am leaving in the

care of my old nurse and friend, Mary M'Ian, of Loch Ranza, in the Isle of Arran, is the true and lawfully begotten child of me and the said Hew Armitage ; that she has been duly christened "Lora" by the Rev. Peter Macrae, of Corrie, in the said Isle of Arran ; and that to her I leave all my worldly possessions of whatsoever kind, present or accruing, and for her own use, and under her own control absolutely ; and I hereby declare that I have left my home for this child's sake, and to prevent the commission of a terrible sin. Up to the age of twenty-one she will be known as Lora Cameron, and thereafter she may take the name to which she is entitled. But to her, if she is spared to read this warning, I urgently pray that on no account will she ever reside under her father's charge. God bless you, my baby, my daughter, and may He have mercy upon the man who has so strangely, so inscrutably been changed from one of the kindest and noblest into one of the most ruthlessly sinful of men. Dictated in great haste and tribulation by me, and written by the aforesaid Rev. Peter Macrae,

I, the said Mona Cameron Armitage, hereto affix my signature, in the presence of the said Rev. Peter Macrae and the aforesaid Mrs. Mary M'Ian,

‘MONA ARMITAGE.

‘Peter Macrae, witness,

‘Mary M'Ian, witness.

‘I, the aforesaid Rev. Peter Macrae, hereby declare that I duly wrote the above as dictated to me by the said Mrs. Mona Cameron Armitage, having first given my word of honour to keep the matter absolutely secret, and being convinced of the verity of the reason which has prompted the said Mrs. Armitage to act as she has done. I have this day’ (here followed the date in full) ‘baptised the said child by the name of Lora.

‘PETER MACRAE,

‘Minister of Corrie.

‘Duncan Macalister, elder, witness.

‘Andrew Macmillan, elder, witness.’

Enclosed in this communication was a long, narrow slip of paper, unfolding which Sir John read out the statements therein, which

were the certified extract from the Register of Births, giving the exact date of birth, and other particulars concerning Lora Cameron Armitage.

‘There cannot be a shadow of a doubt about it now,’ cried Sir John, exultantly. ‘Lora, dear, the mystery of your parentage is made clear at last; you have come into knowledge of your true name and position, and beyond all doubt you are a landed proprietor and an heiress to a very large fortune. Why, Lora, my girl, you will be such a grand lady, you will be marrying a duke or somebody and forgetting all about us, not to speak of poor Duncan.’

‘Oh, Sir John, how can you say such things even in fun. But—but—I cannot feel so happy as you would fain have me do; for it makes me sad beyond measure to think of all my poor mother must have suffered.’

‘Dr. Steele has come, my lady,’ announced the servant at this juncture; ‘shall I show him in?’

‘Yes, show him here.’

‘Nothing could be more opportune,’ went on

Sir John, 'for no one can better narrate to you the sad story of your father's and mother's lives. Ah, here you are, old friend! Yes, we have found all to be as we surmised. Lora Cameron is now Lora Armitage. She will show you this letter of her mother's, and then you will tell her all you know, and, meanwhile, we will leave you to yourselves.'

As soon as Sir John and Lady Ramsay had gone, Lora went up to Dr. Steele, and, taking his hand in hers, said, simply,

'You knew my mother—and my father?'

'Yes, my dear. They were my dearest friends, and in all my long experience I have seen no sadder fate than theirs—for this reason, that both suffered dreadfully, without fault on either side. Poor Hew, poor Mona! it is difficult, even now, for me to recall those weary days of agony and slow despair without feeling deeply, deeply saddened.'

Thereafter Dr. Steele related to Lora all he could tell regarding her parents; how happy they had been, how at last some little cloud had confused the clearness of her judgment, how an

alien element of disturbance came in, how Mr. Armitage was puzzled and annoyed by a mysterious forgery, and all the long, sad story.

‘The last thing I heard,’ concluded the narrator, ‘was from your father himself. This was in a letter which he had sent to me from Melbourne, stating that he had been shamefully and cruelly misled by the man Charles Leith; that, after dreadful sufferings of mind and body, he had learned that his wife had never left the country at all, and had been dead for months, and that though he had tracked his cowardly and shameless foe from place to place, the latter had finally escaped out of the very jaws of death. Of all that your poor father suffered, or rather of all that in a previous letter he told me, I shall some day make you aware; now, it is of no use, and I am glad to know that long ago he found that rest and peace which would never have been his had he continued this earthly life. For, my dear, the ship in which your father sailed was never heard of more; either the *Macedon* foundered, or took fire somewhere on the high seas, or possibly she was lost within

sight of land in a terrible gale, which some eighteen or nineteen years ago wrought enormous havoc along the English and Irish seaboard.'

'Then it is true that I am the heiress to my father's property, and that there will be no one to dispossess? I cannot tell you how repugnant it would be to me to turn out some one who for close upon twenty years had come to regard Firnie Knowe as his own.'

'You are undisputed heiress. Sir John may have told you about Maxwell Armitage. He is a very wealthy man himself, and certainly did not need either Firnie Knowe or the large fortune going with it; but, all the same, there are few men who would forego such possession merely on account of a conviction that the owner would yet turn up. As the years went by, Maxwell would occasionally use Firnie Knowe for a week or so at the time of the grouse-shooting, but all the rest of the year he left it in charge of an elderly woman, who was the wife of the head gardener at the time of your father's departure for Australia, and who

has ever since acted most satisfactorily the part of housekeeper. I often look up Mrs. Fyfe in passing Firnie Knowe, for, as Sir John may have told you, or as, by the way, I told you myself, my place called the Cedars is in close proximity to *your* property. I can assure you that you will meet with nothing but welcome from Maxwell Armitage and his charming wife.'

And so it proved. Her cousin—for so the gentleman in question told Lora she must consider him—seemed delighted to find that his prophecy was at least in part true, and did everything in his power to render the legal acknowledgment of Lora's claims an accomplished fact. At the request of herself and Sir John he constituted himself her guardian and trustee until she was of age, always adding that he was prepared any day to find either Mr. Hew Armitage turning up, or at least some word of or from him. This reasonless persistence used to annoy Dr. Steele very much, and even the genial temper of Sir John occasionally became a little ruffled, especially as Maxwell Armitage

declared invariably that his belief was nothing more than a fancy. But to Lora it seemed almost prophetic. She never said to anyone that she shared her cousin's obstinate belief, nor did she ever even to herself admit the possibility of its proving to be well based, but deep down in her heart there lay dormant a vague expectation which it would take long waiting to wholly quench.

With Sir John, Helen, and Lady Ramsay she paid a short visit to Dr. Steele at the Cedars, and each day spent all the available time in the house or grounds where her parents had lived so happily until the first foreshadowing came of that great sorrow which so eclipsed all their chance of future happiness.

It was arranged that Lora should stay with the Ramsays until her twenty-first birthday at any rate, and that Maxwell Armitage should advance to her a large allowance for all personal needs. It was after her return from a call on the wife of the latter, at their house in Fettes Row, that Lora was informed by the servant that a gentleman was in the library who was desirous of seeing her.

CHAPTER VI.

UNEXPECTED NEWS.

A SUDDEN, foolish hope came into Lora's mind that Edward Duncan had somehow returned; and just as she turned the handle of the door another fancy replaced this—that her long-lost father had at last turned up, as Maxwell Armistage had always prophesied.

In the room she saw a slightly-built man of very gentlemanly appearance, and apparently verging on sixty; but as soon as she drew a little closer she saw that, despite the grey hair and the deeply-lined face, the gentleman before her was probably under fifty.

He looked at her earnestly without speaking, and Lora's heart beat high with unaccountable

excitement. At last she broke the awkward silence by announcing that she was the Miss Armitage whom he had asked to see.

‘I cannot see any marked resemblance, and yet there is an unmistakable, far-away likeness to my poor dear friend.’

‘Of whom do you speak, sir?’

‘Ah! I forgot. Pray, excuse me, Miss Armitage, I was one of your father’s dearest and most intimate friends, though for many years I knew him by a different name than that which was his own. I have come to this country to fulfil his urgent request that I should undertake the adjustment of a matter which had, through no fault of his own, been allowed to fall into sad and possibly irremediable confusion.’

‘I do not understand you, sir,’ cried Lora, excitedly. ‘You speak of having come over to this country to fulfil some request of my father’s as if he had only recently died. Surely it is a very leisurely beginning to start such an inquiry twenty years after his death.’

A puzzled look came into the stranger’s face.

‘I also do not quite understand. Ah! of course—how dense I have been. Why, of course, you have all along imagined your father to have died long ago.’

‘Is it not so?’

‘No, he died rather less than a year ago. I——’

At this moment Sir John Ramsay came into the room, having learned that a stranger was interviewing Lora, and being apprehensive that some charlatan was sponging on her charity. In a few words Lora explained to him what she knew, and Sir John at once begged the visitor to be seated.

‘I presume I have the honour of addressing Sir John Ramsay—a gentleman of whom I have often heard, but of whose work in art I am unfortunately ignorant, owing to my lifelong absence from this country?’

Sir John bowed in acquiescence, but did not speak.

‘Permit me to introduce myself as Mr. Edwin Farquhar, late of Warralong, in the province of New South Wales. I have come over

to this country charged with an important commission from my poor friend Hew Armitage, or, as I knew him for long, John Williams. I will narrate to you, Miss Armitage, as briefly and as succinctly as I can, all that I know concerning your late father. In the spring of 18— I was returning to Sydney from Cape Town in a vessel called the *Dolphin*, and, when about half-way, one of the crew one day sighted a great spar right ahead, and on this spar a human being. The unfortunate man was still living, but he could give no account of himself, and there was absolutely no clue as to who he was, or as to the ship in which he had been wrecked. As we neared our destination, it became evident that, with the return of physical health, the castaway had not regained full mental vigour, though this showed itself only in a remarkable loss of memory. He had absolutely no idea of what his name was, what ship he had sailed in, from what port he had embarked, or for what destination he had been bound. The night before we landed, knowing the complete destitution in which he was, and at the same time

being anxious to obtain the services of an honest and worthy man to take charge of an up-country station I had hitherto managed myself, I made him an offer, which he at once and gratefully accepted. It was no doubt a foolish thing for me to do, but I felt strongly drawn to the man, and felt certain that he was a gentleman by birth, education, and nature. Well, to make a long story short John Williams (for so he determined to call himself) became my foremost assistant, and in a comparatively short space of time became really invaluable. Energetic, intelligent, temperate, firm, full of tact and intuitive knowledge of men, I saw that in John Williams I had come across a treasure of a helpmate—so much so that, as I found my affairs prospering far beyond anything I had accomplished by myself, I determined to take him into partnership, knowing well that such a man would soon be offered terms which would make him leave mere stewardship. I never regretted any step less, for, in addition to an invaluable partner, I found I had acquired a friend, a man of much mental power and of great beauty of nature. After some time

he gave up all efforts to recall his past, and contented himself with the work of the present—though I always knew that, as soon as he had acquired a fortune, he meant to start on a long quest after some clue that should elucidate the mysterious darkness that shrouded his past years.

‘ Well, as I have said, we prospered greatly. Perhaps, to my shame be it said, I urged Williams to marry, because I feared he would some day announce that he was going to break up the partnership and start on his long and probably futile inquiry: but he would never put up with any suggestion of the kind, and even seemed to have an intense aversion to the subject being broached in however light and casual a manner. And we were really like brothers; indeed, we loved each other more affectionately and sincerely than is the case with most veritable brothers. But, after long unbroken success, came the first of those terrible seasons of prolonged drought under which Australia has suffered so greatly of late. We were among the first to suffer materially, and then disaster after dis-

aster came ; till at the end of three years—that is, about the fifteenth of our partnership, there came the ruin that had been so long impending. To make matters more wretched still, Williams caught a fever and became very, very ill. Fortunately, a doctor lived at a small township about eighty miles away from us, and him I persuaded to take up his abode at Warra-long until my friend should be out of danger. But one day, to my great grief, this doctor told me that there was little hope of ultimate recovery, as his patient was suffering from a far-gone disease of the heart in addition to his fever ; and then he told me that Williams had regained consciousness, and was particularly anxious to see me.

‘ When he was strong enough to converse, he told me, poor fellow, that he knew he had not got long to live, and then that he had something of the utmost importance to say to me. With much difficulty, for he was very weak, he narrated to me the strange story of which you already know part. “ I am not John Williams, but Hew Armitage,” he told me ; and then he

informed me how, after his illness, all his past had come back to him, and how it was a realisation of that past that had injuriously affected his already diseased heart. Next day he was apparently stronger, and he told me the long, sad story of his life—all about his wife Mona, her strange disappearance with their child; his torture by a villain called Charles Leith; his sufferings as a castaway from the *Fair Hope*, and on board the same small boat in which was his deadly enemy; his chase of the foe throughout New South Wales and Victoria; the ultimate escape of the latter, and his own acquaintance with the fact of his wife's death; his starting homeward again in a vessel called the *Macedon*; the overwhelming of that ship in a terrific hurricane, and his escape through having lashed himself on a floating spar. "And now, after more than eighteen years' forgetfulness," he went on, "I have awakened to full remembrance of all my sad past. I know I have not long to live now, so I have drawn out a statement which I will get Turnbull and Dr. Dixon to sign as witnesses, and with this statement I wish you

to return to the old country and act in strict accordance with my instructions. You must first," he said, "make every possible effort to find out if my daughter is alive; if so, where she is; and then to enable her to take her place as my heiress. As she will be under age for some time to come, and as she will probably not be in a fit state to become mistress of so large an amount of money and a property like Firmie, I wish your guardianship to extend till she has attained her twenty-fifth birthday, and in the documentary statement in question you will find I have made unmistakable arrangements. Failing my daughter being alive, I leave you, my dear friend, my landed property and one half my fortune, the remainder to go to various charities; if she *should* be alive, you are to have ten thousand pounds down, and a yearly sum of three hundred pounds so long as your guardianship extends."

'All this and more Hew Armitage told me, and before his death he had the statement I speak of properly drawn out, signed, and witnessed. After his death, I realised what personal

property remained to me out of our joint ruin, and came over here to fulfil my dear friend's last wishes. On arriving in Scotland I went at once to Firnie Knowe, but from a gardener there I learnt that my search never need begin, for that, two days before, you, Miss Armitage, had returned to town with your friends the Ramsays, after a short visit to Dr. Steele at the neighbouring Cedars. The man was communicative, and told me all he knew concerning you, and how recently you had found out that your name was not Lora Cameron, but Lora Armitage.

‘What I have now got to do, Sir John Ramsay, is to satisfy myself that this young lady is unmistakably the daughter of the late Hew Armitage, and thereafter I will assume that guardianship which my dear friend so earnestly prayed me to undertake.’

‘Very good, Mr. Farquhar,’ rejoined Sir John, as Lora thought, rather stiffly; ‘and on my part, as voluntary guardian, and on the part of Mr. Maxwell Armitage, as natural guardian, we will jointly make all inquiry into your representations.’

‘How do you mean, Sir John? I am supported by the document in question, for of course I do not ask you to accept my word alone.’

‘Very good, sir. Will you come in this evening, and I will ask Mr. Maxwell Armitage and Dr. Steele to meet you?’

‘Why Dr. Steele? What has he to do with the matter?’

‘He was the late Mr. Armitage’s oldest and best friend, and, whatever his advice may be, I should feel inclined to abide by it.’

Mr. Farquhar smiled in quiet acquiescence. Sir John had hitherto thought him a handsome and even distinguished-looking man, but this smile so altered his whole appearance that a swift dislike, not yet consciously felt, sprang into being in the heart of the former.

‘And now, Miss Armitage, may I have a private talk with you? I have much to tell you of your poor father, of what he hoped for you if you were still alive, and of his last days.’

Lora expressed her willingness to listen, and Sir John withdrew, again expressing his hope to

see Mr. Farquhar the same evening and to peruse the promised document.

‘Miss Armitage—or Lora, as I ought to call you—it was your father’s wish,’ he added, seeing the young girl’s hesitation.

‘If my father wished it,’ began Lora, reluctantly.

‘He did, Lora. He wished me to take his place in all things. And now I will tell you all about his later life, and all he wished me to do for you.’

When Sir John and Lady Ramsay saw their late ward again, it was evident that she had been greatly affected.

‘At the first,’ she said, ‘I did not quite take to Mr. Farquhar, as was indeed natural. I don’t want any other guardian than you, dear Sir John, though I am quite willing that Cousin Maxwell should manage my affairs. But I see that Mr. Farquhar is a noble nature—self-sacrificing, generous, true-hearted to the last degree.’

‘Did he tell you so?’ asked Sir John, drily.

‘No, of course not, but I easily gathered it

from his narration. I am thankful my father had such a friend, and only too gladly will I fulfil all his requests. But on one point I think I am better able to judge than my poor father, who never knew you or dear Lady Ramsay—the best and kindest friends ever orphan girl had—and that is as regards my home till I am of age. According to Mr. Farquhar, this, as regards my succeeding to the property and fortune, will not be for between five or six years yet, since my father has fixed on twenty-five as the date at which I am to assume my own responsibilities.’

‘I think that judgment could be set aside. Your father decided thus in the fear that you might have been brought up anyhow, and that you would not for a long time be fitted to become a rich person. He acted wisely, but it has not been as he feared.’

‘If my father willed it, I think I would rather keep to his arrangement. But what I want is this: will you and Lady Ramsay let me stay with you until I am twenty-five—or until—until—well, until Edward asks me to marry him? You see, I admire Mr. Farquhar, but I could not go

and live at Firmie with him and a governess or companion as he wishes me to do.'

'Certainly not, Lora; don't do anything of the kind,' said Sir John, sharply. 'And look here, my dear: don't give any promise to him about anything without consulting Mr. Armitage or myself; will you, dear?'

'I will do as you wish, of course, dear Sir John; but I think you are unjust to suspect Mr. Farquhar, for that you *do* suspect him, I see.'

'No, I do not suspect Mr. Farquhar of anything evil, but I cannot help feeling vaguely uneasy. Well, I must be off to that meeting of the Academy, but we will see what our two friends will say to-night concerning your new guardian.'

That evening, while Sir John and Lady Ramsay, Lora, Maxwell Armitage, and Dr. Steele were sitting in the drawing-room, into which the servant had been told to usher no one save Mr. Edwin Farquhar, that gentleman was duly announced.

It was inevitable that there should be a cer-

tain stiffness at first between the new-comer and the others, but, despite Lora's cordiality, it seemed as if the general iciness were never going to thaw.

Instead of taking no notice of Dr. Steele, as Sir John had imagined would be the case, Mr. Farquhar endeavoured to make himself specially agreeable to the stern-faced old gentleman, who, however, retained an ominous stiffness of manner.

At last the subject of the evening was broached, and the visitor again detailed at considerable length all he had to say concerning the late Hew Armitage.

‘Here is the document in question,’ he said, finally, ‘of which I have also drawn out a copy, which I will leave with you, Mr. Armitage, as provisional trustee.’

‘Will you be so good as to read it?’ requested the latter.

Mr. Farquhar unfolded the paper, and read out the contents in a low, clear decisive voice :

The Dying Statement of Hew Armitage.

‘I, Hew Armitage, formerly known as Hew

Armitage, shipowner, of Duudee, in Scotland, and of Firnie Knowe, in Forfarshire of the same, and for the last eighteen years known as John Williams, formerly bailiff to, and for some time past co-partner with, Edwin Farquhar, of Warralong, in the County of Clarendon in the Colonial Province of New South Wales, being at the point of death, but at the same time in my right mind, do hereby, in the presence of the witnesses hereafter mentioned, solemnly declare as follows:

‘That, on the thirtieth day of March, in the year 18—, I sailed from Melbourne for London on board the *Macedon*; that, after we had been at sea (we were returning by the Cape of Good Hope instead of by Cape Horn) for about three weeks, we were caught in a hurricane, dismasted, and the *Macedon* rendered a total wreck; that we lay water-logged all the next day, and that late the same evening the end of the cyclone caught us again, and literally overwhelmed the ship; that I was fortunate in being able to fasten myself securely to a great spar; that I spent all the night and a great part of the next

day in the sea, which fortunately had rapidly calmed down; and that I then lost all consciousness.

‘Here ends my life as Hew Armitage.

‘From what I subsequently learned I know that I was descried by some one on board a passing vessel, a ship called the *Dolphin*, bound from Cape Town to Sydney, and that it was long before the doctor on board was able to bring me round. In due time I regained my physical vigour, but, though mentally I felt almost equally strong, I discovered that I was suffering from an absolute paralysis of memory. I could not even recall my own name, much less my past life, the name of the ship I had sailed in, from what port we had sailed, or whither we were bound. From being able to speak English more fluently than any other language, I knew that I was British, but more than this I knew nothing. I temporarily chose the name of John Williams—the same that I have ever since been known by. On board the *Dolphin* one passenger was specially kind to me, and for him I soon conceived a

warm and grateful affection, and it was this gentleman, Edwin Farquhar by name, who generously stretched out to me a helping hand when, otherwise friendless and penniless, I found myself on shore again. I now know that if I had stayed any length of time in Sydney I should infallibly have been recognised sooner or later, but, as it happened, Mr. Farquhar wanted to reach his station without delay. To make a long story short, we in due time reached Warralong, then one of the remotest stations in New South Wales, and there I became his bailiff while he attended to another station further north. Prosperity followed our efforts, and in course of time my generous benefactor made me his partner. For a long time past I knew that something was seriously wrong with my heart, but I had foolishly refused to see Dr. Dixon, who resided at the township of Adelong, some eighty miles away. At last I fell ill of fever, and it was during my slow recovery from this attack that the mists cleared away from my mind, and I remembered everything. I think the enforced rest did my heart good, and I might have rallied

completely, for the fever was over, and was not likely to leave permanent ill effects, but the terrible shock that I endured from a full realisation of my past was to prove irrecoverable. The doctor tells me, and I know it to be true, that in a few days at most this weary and much tried heart will cease to beat.

‘Realising, therefore, what important influence it is my right to exercise before death renders further action on my part impossible, I hereby formulate my last wishes and commands.

‘Having already obtained the verbal acquiescence of my dear friend, Edwin Farquhar, to my proposed plan, I need have no doubt as to his doing his best to fulfil my various requests. In the event of his death, my nearest blood-relation will naturally have to assume the trust herein-after specified.

‘As soon as I am dead, Edwin Farquhar will proceed to Scotland, and will do his utmost to find if the daughter of myself and my beloved wife is living. If he succeeds in finding her, he is to assume full and absolute control over her

and her affairs until she attains the age of twenty-five; I having made this stipulation so as to provide against the highly probable contingency that my daughter will not for a long time to come be fit to become mistress of so much wealth. And I hereby make over to the said Edwin Farquhar all and whole my personal estate, now belonging to me, or that may have accrued, or may yet accure, to be held by him as trustee for my said daughter, until she attains the age of twenty-five, at which date his trusteeship and personal guardianship shall cease. And I hereby make over to the said Edwin Farquhar, in the event of my daughter being alive and likely to live, the sum of ten thousand pounds, free of duty, the same to be paid with the least possible delay; and during the period of his trusteeship he shall have the right to live at and occupy Firnie Knowe, and be entitled to withdraw a sufficient sum from the trust to properly maintain the house and policies; and, moreover, he shall, during the aforesaid period, withdraw from the said trust a yearly sum of three hundred pounds, in recompense of the

trouble and responsibility he will have to incur. And in the event of its being proved that my daughter is dead, or if the search prove, after a year's time, to be wholly fruitless, then I bequeath and devise to the said Edwin Farquhar my property of Firnie Knowe, including the house and all its contents, together with one-half of my monetary estate; and the other half shall be distributed by him in accordance with oral instructions given to him by me. And in the event of my daughter's death before she attains the age of twenty-five, or in the event of her marriage without the full consent of her trustee and guardian, the said Edwin Farquhar, then the said Edwin Farquhar will act as I have already specified in the event of his obtaining proof of her being already dead.

‘ This testamentary document, written to my dictation by my friend James Turnbull, of Coorie, in the aforesaid County of Clarendon, has been duly signed by me at Warralong aforesaid, on this the sixth day of July, eighteen hundred and blank, in the presence of the said James Turnbull and of Dr. Arthur

Dixon, who hereto subscribe their names as witnesses.

‘HEW ARMITAGE.

(John Williams.)

‘James Turnbull, Witness.

‘Arthur Dixon, M.D., Witness.’

‘That is a very extraordinary document,’ remarked Dr. Steele, quietly, as Mr. Farquhar ceased reading.

CHAPTER VII.

FAIR OR FOUL.

THERE was a dead silence after Dr. Steele's remark, save for the rustling sound of the paper as Mr. Farquhar refolded it and placed it on the table beside him.

‘Yes,’ at last said Dr. Steele, ‘it *is* a very strange statement, and very strangely worded. As a man of business, who must accordingly have seen many legal documents, Hew Armitage must have decidedly changed before he wrote this statement here. He was always remarkably lawyer-like in his written directions about anything, and I am certain he would either have worded this statement in more legal fashion, or else have written it more simply—a dying statement, and nothing further.’

A frown had settled on the handsome features of Mr. Farquhar, but he smiled slightly—and it was curious how unpleasant an expression his face took on then—as he said, looking towards Dr. Steele,

‘And pray, sir, what is the conclusion you draw?’

‘I simply give as my opinion, sir, that this document is not worded in the way I should have thought Mr. Hew Armitage would have done it. I do not say he *did not* do it. Of course, he was very ill and weak, and I know too well how slack the mental grasp often is at the last.’

‘Well, Mr. Armitage, as the person most closely concerned after Miss Lora herself, may I ask you what is your opinion?’

‘I think, with my friends here, that the document is a very strange one, but once convinced of its verity—and I have, of course, no reason to doubt it—I would be willing to hand over to you the management of the trust. But you will understand, Mr. Farquhar, that I must, of course, be satisfied as to the genuineness of this document.’

‘I should certainly advise Miss Armitage,’ interposed Sir John, ‘to protest against the arrangement. Things are wholly different from what her father supposed might be the case. Neither she nor her future husband——’

‘Her future husband?’ said Farquhar, in a sharp tone. ‘What do you mean?’

‘Miss Armitage is engaged to be married to a young friend of ours—an artist—Mr. Edward Duncan by name,’

‘I cannot consent to this,’ cried out Mr. Farquhar, in a strangely excited manner, that looked as if he had suddenly lost control of his better judgment.

Before anyone could reply to this strange and emphatic statement, Lora rose, and, looking straight in her new guardian’s face, spoke with considerable hauteur.

‘I do not understand you, sir? *You* forbid my engagement to Mr. Duncan? Pray, what have you got to do with it? Understand at once, Mr. Farquhar, that if the law does constitute you my legal guardian it gives you no other authority over me. In any circumstances,

I refuse to leave my kind friends here till I see fit myself, or until they themselves request it, and would not for a moment hear of living at Firnie with you alone ; and that I will not for a moment put up with any interference in my private affairs.'

An unpleasant smile flickered around Mr. Farquhar's lips as he listened, but when he spoke he had evidently regained his control.

'I spoke hastily, and I ask your pardon. Your father had dwelt longingly on certain plans of his own concerning you, and, as his agent, I spoke decisively, but without reflection. Of course I would never think of interfering with you, my dear ward. And now, Lady Ramsay, Miss Lora, and gentlemen, I wish you good-evening. I shall call on you to-morrow, Mr. Armitage, if you will be so good as to tell me the time and place that will suit you best.'

Having received the information in question, Mr. Farquhar bowed himself out ; and his absence was followed by much discussion.

Lady Ramsay, and Maxwell Armitage, and Lora herself were all satisfied that Mr. Far-

quhar's story was true. Sir John felt a little uncertain, and wished some inquiries to be made, while Dr. Steele remained openly sceptical.

‘The man is either deceiving us or is himself deceived,’ he maintained, ‘and you will see that I am right.’

After much discussion, it was arranged that the document was nominally to be looked on as indisputable, but, as a matter of business, it was not to be carried out in full until satisfactory evidence as to its genuineness was obtained from Australia; meanwhile Mr. Armitage would advance the sum of one thousand pounds to Mr. Farquhar, and he would be permitted to reside at Firnie Knowe for a few weeks, so as to become acquainted with the property and the neighbourhood, but he was to have no control of any kind over Lora. Of course, as soon as confirmation came from Australia, everything now managed by Mr. Armitage would be handed over to the rightful trustee, and Lora could marry as soon as she liked; for, added her cousin, he would willingly advance her a certain sum yearly, to be repaid

at her twenty-fifth birthday, if for any reason her guardian should act unpleasantly in the matter. 'He cannot, of course, prevent your marriage,' he said, 'after you have attained the age of twenty-one; and until that event you can stay either with the Ramsays or myself.'

When next day Mr. Farquhar called on Mr. Maxwell Armitage, he seemed very much put out at the proposed arrangement, regarding it as a personal slight, an insult to his honour, and such as no gentleman could be supposed to endure. But gradually Mr. Armitage brought him to see its reasonableness, winding up with the remark that in six or seven months at most confirmatory intelligence would arrive from Australia, and that it was not very long to wait till then: while, as to the sum of money bequeathed, the thousand pounds to be advanced represented double the amount of interest he would be likely to obtain thereupon.

'The document is signed by Hew Armitage, and no one seems for a moment to dispute the genuineness of the signature,' objected Mr. Far-

quhar, sullenly ; ‘it seems to me that you are legally bound to give way.’

‘It may be so, and you are of course at perfect liberty to try if the law would be on your side. But I am bound to say that we would dispute it to our utmost.’

‘I will let you know my decision to-morrow. Meanwhile, I may content myself with saying that if my poor dead friend knew the unworthy way I was being treated it would cause him genuine grief and anger.’

Mr. Armitage did not expect that Mr. Farquhar would yield, and he very strongly doubted if any legal judgment would set aside his claim ; and he was correspondingly surprised when next day Mr. Farquhar called and announced that he thought the better of his determination.

‘I still think I am not being treated well, and I am sure you will feel deeply mortified when you are at last satisfied. But the truth of the matter is that the last of my fortune is almost gone, and that I have no means of gaining a living here if by ill chance a legal decision

should be given against me. I tell you this frankly, for otherwise I should not fail to assert my just claims.'

And so the matter was settled to the satisfaction of all concerned, save Mr. Farquhar himself. He took rooms in Princes Street, and gradually became an almost daily visitor to Grant Square. He often spoke of going down to Firnie Knowe, but made no attempt to do so, confessing at last that he preferred waiting till the expected news came from over the sea. With Lora he was seen so often, and gradually became so familiar, that, much to the chagrin of the Ramsays, it got bruited abroad that in all probability the handsome guardian would some day marry his ward. At last Lora herself began to notice that his attentions were becoming too marked, and she endeavoured to let her pseudo-guardian see that she did not care for such a degree of affectionate attention.

But in course of time it became evident to all save Lora herself that Mr. Farquhar had gained considerable ascendancy over her, if he had not actually won her daughter-like affection. As a

companion, no one could be more brilliant when he chose, and to the young girl there was an endless fascination in his tales of Australia and Australian life, and of the father whom she had never known. By the end of two months, Mr. Farquhar had become to her a type of all that was generous and chivalric, and, to her great delight, she saw that at last the Ramsays tacitly admitted that their vague distrustfulness had been unfounded.

On one or two occasions Lora was surprised, and rendered vaguely uneasy, by something her father's friend said or did. Twice he had spoken of places abroad—Paris and Homburg—as if he knew them intimately, and yet he had always asserted that since he was a boy he had spent all his mature years in Australia; but, on the other hand, when she had gravely drawn his attention to his statements he seemed in nowise discomposed, and had explained that he had been in these places with his father when very young, and that they had left an extraordinarily keen impression upon him. On the last occasion Lora was considerably more startled.

Mr. Farquhar had been absent from Edinburgh for a week or more, having accepted an invitation to stay with Mr. Maxwell Armitage at his fine property near North Queensferry, and on the eve of his return he was dining at Grant Square. After dinner, and while Sir John, Lady Ramsay, Mr. Farquhar, and herself were sitting chatting in the firelit, dusky drawing-room, a telegram was brought to the first.

‘I’m afraid you have received bad news, John,’ said his wife, anxiously.

‘Yes, dear. Poor Maxwell Armitage! I don’t understand it at all. He always seemed to me in the enjoyment of the most vigorous health, and used to boast that he had the lungs and heart of a war-horse. This telegram is from his wife, telling me that he wants to see me, as he is sinking rapidly from some mysterious malady.’

While Sir John was speaking Lora had, without intention, glanced at their visitor. She distinctly saw a sudden gleam come into his eyes, and a smile wreath round his thin lips, but the next moment this vanished, and he ex-

pressed the utmost concern on behalf of his late host.

This incident impressed Lora most unpleasantly, and it was only by forcing herself to put her vague mistrust into words that she realised how unjust she had been, and bitterly reproached herself for her uncharitableness.

Early next morning Sir John left town for his friend's country residence. Mr. Farquhar had informed him the night before that he had noticed how out of sorts Mr. Armitage had appeared, and that he had inferred from something the latter had said that his business affairs were in a troublesome state.

‘I hope not, I’m sure,’ Sir John had replied; ‘yet I know how careless and easy-going Maxwell is. I know he was in trouble some time ago, but I understood that everything was square again. It would not do for anything material to go wrong, for all I have in the world in the way of accumulated savings is in his hands.’

Mr. Farquhar had offered to go down to Queensferry with him, but he had courteously declined.

When Sir John returned that night it was with serious news.

‘Poor Armitage is dead,’ he told his wife and Lora; ‘dead before I reached him. His wife, poor soul, is in utmost distress, not being able to realise that the strong and vigorously robust man who was her husband had succumbed so rapidly to some mysterious internal complaint. Lora, my dear, he tried to leave some message for you, for me to give to you, but he died without being able to express it.’

Next morning a letter came which caused the ruddy, genial face of the artist to grow suddenly pale. All at table saw something unpleasant had occurred, but no remark was made by his wife till she entered the studio with her husband.

‘Ask Lora to come also,’ he said. ‘Margaret, I have received bad news indeed. The doctors agree that poor Armitage has died not from any internal complaint, but from the administration of poison.’

‘Poison!’ exclaimed Lady Ramsay, in a horrified tone.

‘Yes, poison. But they seem to think that there has been no foul play in the matter; in a word, they believe that he administered it to himself, for in his desk one of the first things they found was a small piece of crumpled paper to which still adhered one or two minute specks of the fatal powder—a desk which he always kept locked, and the key of which was appended to his watch-chain. His wife had opened this desk in their presence, under the impression that some letter from her husband would be found.’

‘How horrible for her in every way. Poor thing, she may yet be even suspected of having herself given her husband the poison.’

‘Well, there can only be two opinions held. Either that some one poisoned him—and in this case it must have been a slow and systematic attempt, for he had been ailing and growing steadily worse for some days past—or else that he poisoned himself. A single dose of arsenic would point to the latter, but the slow poisoning suggests the former. If he *did* do away with himself, it must have been on account of

impending ruin ; and, selfishly, I hope this is not the case, for you know, Margaret, that the savings of the last thirty years were in poor Maxwell's hands.'

'When did the symptoms of his mysterious illness first show themselves?' asked Lora, quietly, but in a constrained voice.

'About six days ago.'

'Three days, then, after Mr. Farquhar became a resident at Heathcliffe?'

No one answered, but all three looked strangely at one another.

'When was his last bad turn before his death?' resumed Lora.

'Between five and six of the afternoon of the day before yesterday is the time mentioned in this letter from my friend, Dr. Montgomerie.'

'That is, an hour or less after Mr. Farquhar left Heathcliffe, and came to dinner here?'

'What do you mean, Lora?' demanded Lady Ramsay, shortly. 'Have you reason to suspect anything? If not, you have no right to give rise to the inferences we must draw from your words.'

‘I have no reason to suspect anything : I am only struck by the coincidences I have referred to.’

‘Mr. Farquhar,’ announced the servant at that moment.

‘Good-evening, Lady Ramsay ; good-evening, Sir John. Lora, I am sorry to see you looking so pale. Well, my friends, this is, indeed, a sad affair. I can assure you I have received quite a shock. Of course I did not know Mr. Armitage very intimately, but after being a guest in a man’s house for a week, and almost immediately afterwards to hear of his death, startles one.’

‘It is strange, Mr. Farquhar,’ said Lora, ‘that you said nothing to Lady Ramsay or myself, or, so far as I know, to Sir John either, about the state in which you left poor Mr. Armitage. You spoke of your visit and the place itself, and Mrs. Armitage, but you did not refer to Mr. Armitage.’

Mr. Farquhar shot a sharp glance at the speaker when she first addressed him, but when she had finished he replied quietly that she

could not have heard him, for he *had* mentioned how unwell his host had seemed, but that he did not enlarge upon the subject because of the great aversion manifested by Mr. Armitage himself to any mention of his indisposition.

‘I ventured to speak to him about it, and urged him to see a doctor, but he wouldn’t hear of such a thing, and at last I saw it was no use to interfere.’

‘I wonder why you did not speak to Mrs. Armitage?’ said Lady Ramsay.

‘I wish now that I had done so, but, as I have already said, I thought it was no use to interfere.’

‘Have you heard the cause of his death?’ asked Sir John.

‘Yes; it is most mysterious. I heard vaguely about it yesterday afternoon, but I could not believe it, so I went over to Queensferry in the evening, and ventured to inquire. I did not see Mrs. Armitage, but I heard what the doctors surmised. I left a brief note for the poor widow, and came straight here.’

‘I am going there now,’ said Sir John, ‘and

I—bother! there's some one else being shown here.'

'This is a groom, Sir John, from Mr. Armitage's.'

'I have come up with this note from Dr. Montgomerie, sir, and with a message from Mrs. Armitage to know if you can come to Queensferry at once.'

'My dear Sir John,' ran the note, 'there can now be little doubt that I am in the right in supposing poor Armitage to have put an end to himself. This morning I and Dr. Brooks entered the room where he lies—and behind the bedstead and the wall, where it had evidently fluttered in falling from the corner of the dressing-table, I saw a piece of paper. It was a half-sheet, with the owner's crest and address on it, bearing the words, "*Everything is going wrong; I can stand it no longer.—M. A.*" This is fairly conclusive proof that his business affairs have been going wrong, and that they unsettled his judgment to such an extent that he committed this unfortunate act. In my opinion he hoped

to make it appear as if his death arose from some internal trouble, that thus he poisoned himself slowly, but that only at the last he realised he would be unable to hide the truth, and so wrote that note. Poor Mrs. A. is in great distress, and seems very anxious to see you. Yours in haste,

‘A. MONTGOMERIE.’

‘I will go down at once. Mr. Farquhar, pray excuse me, and also my not asking you to come back to dinner to-night. If you will call about this time to-morrow, I shall be glad to see you, as there are certain matters we must talk over.’

When Sir John reached Heathcliffe he found Dr. Montgomerie in attendance upon Mrs. Armitage, who had almost succumbed to the shock of her husband’s death. After some conversation on the matter, Dr. Montgomerie resumed the subject of the paper that had been found.

‘Don’t you think I am right in my supposition, Sir John? Strange to say, neither Dr. Brooks nor Mrs. Armitage shares my view. The

latter declares that, though she knew her husband was anxious about the aspect of his business affairs, he was not seriously worrying himself about them ; and, moreover, that she is certain no such paper was in the room on the night of his death or the morning following, for that she would inevitably have seen it. Brooks also seems suspicious of something ; he knows that Maxwell Armitage had one serious failing, and that was his susceptibility to the charms of any pretty jade who put herself in his way. He seems to have been carrying on a mild flirtation with a girl in the house, but either his good feeling or some remonstrance from his wife made him draw back in time, and Brooks seems to have suspicions that the girl has been revenging herself. As he says, there is no one else to suspect, save Mrs. Armitage and Mr. Farquhar. Of course the guilt of the first is out of the question, and no possible motive can be discovered for a perfect stranger's having committed such an act.'

Sir John did not feel so sure about this, remembering the disappointment Mr. Farquhar

had had to put up with in connection with the will of Hew Armitage.

‘Brooks has very kindly gone into Dundee to find out how affairs stand there. He will be back very shortly.’

When Sir John saw the widow she begged of him that she might become the guest of himself and Lady Ramsay for a little, as she could not bear to be at Heathcliffe now.

‘Of course, dear Mrs. Armitage. You will be most welcome.’

‘There is one thing—there is one thing, Sir John, I must ask—though, perhaps, I have no right to do so. And that is, I beg of you that you will excuse my meeting Mr. Farquhar at your house. I cannot tell you how much I dislike the man. I believe he has helped Maxwell towards his ruin. One day—the day after he came—I heard him telling my husband about some miraculous new investment, some Australian thing, for the value of which he could vouch, and which he fully believed would turn out the greatest thing in the world. Poor Maxwell was always very credulous in these things, and I

know that he followed Mr. Farquhar's advice, probably to lose—if he had not already lost—all the money which he put into it. But it is not for this alone that I dislike the man. I disliked him from the first, and can't bear him to be near me. I do not believe that my husband poisoned himself; I do not believe he feared any disasters that might come upon us. He was not a coward, either physically or morally.'

'Then what *do* you think, Mrs. Armitage?'

'I dare not say what I think. Ah, there is Dr. Brooks' voice.'

Shortly afterwards Dr. Brooks, a small, thin, wiry man, with an expression of excessive alertness, came into the room.

'I do not bring good news, Mrs. Armitage, I am sorry to say. Ah, Sir John Ramsay, I had the pleasure of meeting you once years ago, and am glad to resume the brief acquaintance then made. Most sincerely I regret to have to tell you, madam, that your late husband's affairs are in the greatest confusion; indeed, the offices are closed, and the evening papers are calling out another great failure. It is best you should

know it, though perhaps you may not thank me for putting it to you so abruptly. But I may frankly state that, up to my going into Dundee, I had suspected foul play somewhere in the matter of poor Mr. Armitage's death, a suspicion which I know you shared; but now I am convinced that I was wholly mistaken, and that Montgomerie's view was the right one.'

It was accepted that Maxwell Armitage had committed suicide while in an unsound state of mind, it having naturally been held that a man in the prime of life, and circumstanced as he was, must needs have been half-mad before he could have put an end to himself, even under the dread of impending bankruptcy.

But his widow was not the only sufferer, for all the life-long savings of Sir John Ramsay were lost in the general smash. It was a great blow to him and his wife, for with a large family his expenses were constantly increasing, and already both he and his wife had become anxious about the future of their boys; and, though he could still depend upon making a

good income yearly, his health was no longer robust, and he knew that, if he died now, he would have to leave his wife and daughters almost penniless. Lora's property, of which Maxwell Armitage had kept such loyal stewardship, was unharmed, and she was the only person who came out of the general ruin without loss.

Immediately after the funeral, Mrs. Armitage returned with Sir John to Grant Square. She had literally nothing in the world belonging to her, for her own property had not been sufficiently secured, and had been lost with the rest, and, though there was some hope that eventually she might recover something, she would have nothing for a long time to come. It was a sad party which sat grouped in the firelit studio the evening of the day on which Maxwell Armitage had been laid in his grave. Sir John and Lady Ramsay were very despondent, Mrs. Armitage was overcome with grief and the shock of the abrupt change in her fortunes, Helen Ramsay and Lora spoke in whispers.

At last the latter rose and went over to the poor widow.

‘Dear Mrs. Armitage, I want you to let me do something. Will you promise?’

‘What do you want, my dear?’

‘You know how noble and loyal and generous your husband was in the matter of his stewardship over my property. Well, the very least thing I could do, as some slight acknowledgment of the great wealth he has so carefully husbanded for me, is to gladly insist on your accepting a portion of it, so that you may not be dependent upon others. Hush! You must not remonstrate. You know how wealthy I shall be in a few months hence, and that whatever I make over to you—and I do not consider it a gift, but an acknowledgment—I will in no sense miss; you know also that I and Edward Duncan were to have been married on his return from Australia on a very small income, and that anything additional I bring will be quite unexpected.’

Mrs. Armitage threw her arms round Lora’s neck, but was unable to speak from emotion.

‘Dear Mrs. Armitage,’ said Sir John, ‘Lora is just doing what we should all have expected her to do. She is a dear, generous girl, but she could not well do less—that is, being Lora Armitage. And, meanwhile, you must make your home with us.’

The door opened as he finished speaking, and Mr. Farquhar came in and shook hands with all in the room save with Mrs. Armitage, who closed her eyes and lay back on the sofa.

‘My dear Mrs. Armitage, I trust I see you in a little better health now that you are among good friends and in a house that is almost a home to you?’

No answer came from the recumbent figure on the sofa.

‘Ah, I see. She is asleep or tired out. Poor Mrs. Armitage.’

‘Keep your pity to yourself, Edwin Farquhar,’ cried the widow, with abrupt vehemence. ‘I never wish to hold converse with you again, and I request you once and for all to remember whenever we meet that I am not only a stranger to you, but one who wishes to remain a stranger.’

‘Very good, Mrs. Armitage,’ was the reply, in a cold, quiet tone, ‘though I am at a loss to understand the reason of your not over-courteous frankness.’

‘You understand well enough, and now pray address me no further.’

Farquhar bowed, while a nervous twitch at his mouth showed how great an effort he was making to restrain himself.

‘I have called to inform you, Lora, that I have been legally installed your guardian and trustee. I have looked through the accounts kept by Mr. Maxwell Armitage, and I find everything satisfactory. I will call here to-morrow forenoon to talk over certain matters with you. And now I will say good-night.’

‘One moment, Mr. Farquhar,’ said Lora. ‘I will see you out, if you will permit me. I have something I want to say to you at once.’

As soon as Lora and her guardian reached the ground floor, the former opened the door of the library and beckoned her companion to follow.

‘Mr. Farquhar, when you come back to-

morrow, I want the sum of eight hundred pounds.'

'Do you, indeed, Lora,' said Mr. Farquhar, with the faintest echo of mockery in his voice, yet not so faint but that his ward noticed it. 'That is a large sum of money to want all at once. You have a good allowance already, especially as Sir John has never taken anything for your board. Of course, if your personal expenses exceed your income, I will see to its being increased. But, as your trustee, my dear Lora, I could not feel myself justified in advancing you a large sum without, in the first place, understanding what it was for, and, in the next, approving.'

Lora flushed, but checked herself on the point of giving back an angry answer.

'I have no objection, Mr. Farquhar, to tell you what I want the money for; but I certainly do not recognise your right to decide as to the propriety of any judgment I may hold and intend to fulfil. I wish the sum in question, because it is my intention to allow Mrs. Armitage a yearly sum of eight hundred pounds, in some

slight acknowledgment of all that I am indebted to her late husband for; she is left absolutely penniless, poor thing. As I am not to have control of my property till I am twenty-five, I cannot, I suppose, make over to her the necessary capital, but I wish this sum to be annually allowed to her in the meantime. So I want four hundred pounds as a half-year's payment in advance. Then I wish to give a hundred pounds to the old housekeeper at Heathcliff. She has lost her place after being thirty years in the service of her late master and his father before him, and she is anxious to live quietly in the country the rest of her days. She has enough to live upon, if she had no rent to pay, and as I know of a little cottage at North Queensferry, costing about seventy pounds and not requiring much doing up, I have determined to take it for her. And, thirdly, I can no longer consent to be a burden on my dear friends, the Ramsays, especially after the heavy loss they have sustained in the failure. So I will insist on them accepting the sum of three hundred a-year for my board and for all the innumerable things

they do for me. That, you see, makes up the sum of eight hundred pounds.'

'Well, Lora, I will say good-night now, and will think your proposals over.'

'Think them over, Mr. Farquhar? Now that you see the money is to be well spent, I do not see what you can have to say.'

'Eight hundred pounds is a sum not always to be obtained at once.'

'Oh, of course a day or two makes no difference.'

'Well, we will see. Good-night, Lora.'

'I want to understand, Mr. Farquhar, whether you are going to help me to what I want or not?'

'I will see how matters stand, Lora ; I can say nothing more till I have gone carefully into the accounts, and till I can be assured that withdrawal of such a sum would not necessitate selling out some well-invested stock.'

'Oh, what do I care about losing some trifling percentage? I'm not a pauper—I'm not in a position where a change from six per cent. to

four per cent. means privation, or even noticeable difference. Be assured I will never call you to account for such a thing as this.'

'Good-night, now. I will see you to-morrow.'

'Mr. Farquhar, why won't you give me an answer?'

'Lora, you do not understand these things. I will act on your behalf as I think best. Meanwhile oblige me by saying nothing either to Mrs. Armitage or Sir John or Lady Ramsay about your very generous but somewhat high-flown intentions. Good-night again.'

After Mr. Farquhar had gone, Lora stayed a while in the library, the tears of indignation and surprise falling down her flushed cheeks.

'I hate that man!' she muttered. 'I wonder how I could ever have endured him. But I won't allow him to domineer over me. For one thing, I am glad I have told Mrs. Armitage already.'

Before she went to bed she went into Lady Ramsay's room, and told her of the arrangement she had made. Lady Ramsay at first protested

against the amount, but Lora pointed out that it would not do more than cover expenses from the time she had left Oban with her friends till next autumn, when Edward would be home, and when they would be married.

Next day Mr. Farquhar came at the appointed hour, and was shown into the library, where Lora was awaiting him.

‘Have you arranged, as I asked you?’ she began, the moment the first greetings were over.

‘I have arranged that you should have a certain sum for the charitable purposes mentioned, but not what you, in your excess of generosity, desired. Even if I wished—that is, even if I approved of the expenditure, I do not see how the sum you mentioned last night could be conveniently raised at present. I bring you one hundred and fifty pounds.’

‘One hundred and fifty! I fail to understand your meaning.’

‘Well, on thinking the matter over, I quite agree with you that the Ramsays should be remunerated for your board. But one hundred

and fifty a-year is an ample sum to allow for this purpose, seeing that you discharge all your ordinary expenses yourself.'

'It is *not* enough.'

'I am the best judge of that, Lora. Well, half of one hundred and fifty pounds is seventy five, and this amount you can pay to Sir John, or, better still, leave me to do so, as I must have his receipt therefor. Then, as to the Armitages' housekeeper, I consider that your purchasing the cottage is quixotic. You can do it up and rent it for the old woman, if you want, and for this I have brought you twenty-five pounds instead of the one hundred pounds you wanted. Lastly, as to Mrs. Armitage: I cannot consent to your burdening yourself with her maintenance. After you are twenty-five, you may do as you like, but, until then, your affairs are under my charge, and I cannot consent to this quite absurd proposal of yours. Mrs. Armitage has relations, I presume, and they can look after her. Moreover, it is almost certain that she will ultimately get back a little of her own property. But, as you wish to make her a pre-

sent in return for her husband not having criminally squandered your fortune, I don't object to you giving her a fifty pound note. These are the three items—seventy-five, twenty-five, and fifty pounds—that makes up the hundred and fifty I have brought you.'

Lora had kept her clear, dark-blue eyes fixed steadily on those of Mr. Farquhar as he spoke, and slowly her lips had curved in a scornful smile as he went on. When he had finished she looked at him from head to foot, an angry flush passing rapidly across her face.

'I consider your communication most insulting, Mr. Farquhar. I will consult Sir John Ramsay and Dr. Steele as to what means are necessary to protest against your authority, and, in any case, there can be no doubt you can be prevented from acting as trustee till confirmatory evidence comes from Australia.'

'Don't talk nonsense, Lora,' said her guardian, angrily. 'I am legally your trustee, and nothing can affect my position. You will only make things more unpleasant for yourself. But I am willing to accede to your request if you will

accede to one of mine. I will give you the money you want for Mrs. Armitage and the Heathcliffe housekeeper, and even for the Ramsays, if you will take up house at Firnie Knowe. You can have anyone as a companion whom you would like, and I promise that you could have no kinder guardian than I would be.'

'I have already told you, sir, that on *no* account would I consent to any such arrangement—less now than ever. I shall stay with the Ramsays till my twenty-first birthday, which is not so very far off now ; and then, as soon as I am married, I shall live with my husband at Firnie Knowe.'

'Ah, that reminds me, Lora, I have made inquiries concerning Mr. Edward Duncan, and the result is that I must emphatically forbid your marriage with that gentleman. From this time forward you must consider the engagement at an end.'

'Are you mad, Mr. Farquhar? Do you think I for one moment care whether you approve of my engagement or not. Your approval is a

matter of absolute indifference to me, and I shall marry Mr. Duncan as soon as he asks me. You forget that by the time he returns I shall be legally of age. As for the insulting remarks you have made against him personally, I can only say that I don't believe you know anything about Mr. Duncan.'

'For one thing, I may mention that I have just been affording a little relief to a poor girl who came to sorrow and disgrace through your friend Mr. Duncan. I saw her shivering in the bitter cold two or three nights ago in a street off Princes Street, hugging her baby to her arms, and too wretched even to beg. I gave her something, and, to my surprise, she burst into tears, and then told me her story, a sad one of treacherous seduction and cruel desertion. Mechanically I asked her the name of the villain, and she told me his name was Edward Duncan, and that he was an artist, and that he had recently left Edinburgh for Australia and left her to her fate. As I did not wish this to get bruited about, for your sake, I gave her all the money I had with me, and told her it was

because I knew Duncan, and that I was glad to be able to do even this small reparation.'

'I do not believe you.'

'Lora !'

'I repeat, I do not believe you. You who have just refused to assist poor Mrs. Armitage, whose husband you helped towards his ruin, are not a likely person to have been so generous to a street outcast.'

'It is you who are insulting now—most insulting.'

'Moreover, I don't believe one word of the girl's story !'

'What object could she have in giving me Mr. Duncan's name ?'

'I don't know. But this I do know—and the fact is one you will find somewhat difficult to reconcile with the accusation you have seen fit to make—that Edward Duncan has lived in Paris and London for the last few years, and that the brief yearly holiday he allowed himself in Scotland was invariably spent with the Ramsays at Oban. He has not been in Edinburgh for some five or six years. I think I am justi-

fied in saying that I do not believe one word of what you have told me.'

'I will not speak to you again, Lora, till you have apologised for your undutiful and disrespectful behaviour, and to punish you I will not even leave this money with you just now'—and, saying this, Mr. Farquhar took up the roll of notes he had put on the table, and left the room.

CHAPTER VIII.

A FALSE MOVE.

VERY excited and angry, indeed, did Lora Armitage feel when Farquhar had left the room, and she found herself alone. Her first impulse was to go to Sir John Ramsay, but she remembered that he and Dr. Steele had gone somewhere for the day. The rest of the household she knew to be out, so, after some deliberation, she put on her things and went round to pay a long call to Mrs. Stuart, at whose house she met with the most genial welcome.

Late in the evening she returned to Grant Square, but found that Sir John had not yet returned, and that Lady Ramsay and Helen were dining out. After dinner the boys left the

house, and the little ones went to bed, and Lora for the first time was left alone. She felt very dull and depressed, and would gladly have gone upstairs and sat by Mrs. Armitage, who had been very unwell for the last two days, but that she was told the latter had at last fallen asleep, and should on no account be disturbed.

Taking a book in her hand, she sat before the fire in the drawing-room, and at last fell into an uneasy slumber.

A number of strange, fragmentary dreams flitted through her passive mind, all of them vaguely distressing, but none realistic enough to waken her. But at last they became more coherent and unpleasant. She dreamed that she entered a house filled with innumerable rooms, looking into every one of which she saw a slim man clad all in black and with averted face—always the same man, but constantly in some new position, yet invariably engaged in doing the same thing—dropping something, now into a glass, now into a cup, now into a medicine phial. The action became horribly suggestive to her, and yet she did not realise

what it was suggestive of. But at last it seemed to her that in the hundredth room she saw the same man unfolding a piece of paper, and that on this paper was a label bearing the word POISON. Looking at the man with a sudden dread, he turned round and showed to her the face of her guardian. With a cry she awoke, only to find that she had been dreaming. Was she really awake, was the thought that flashed through her mind the next moment, for there on the hearth-rug before her stood Mr. Farquhar, leaning against the mantel-piece and looking at her. But a slight movement convinced her, and she rose up from the low chair into which she had sunk with her book.

‘Mr. Farquhar! I am surprised to see you here. When did you come in? I did not hear you. I have been asleep.’

‘Yes, and you looked so pretty in your sleep, Lora—pretty, indeed! you looked lovely, beautiful.’

‘You had no right to stare at me while I lay there unconscious. It was not the act of a gentleman. You should have awakened me when you came in.’

‘Lora, I came to ask your pardon for the too authoritative way I spoke to you this morning, and also for having denied you what you want.’

‘Very good, but what about that story of the outcast you told me?’

‘Lora, I swear it was true. I was too offended to tell you that the girl had followed him from London. I have her address, and you can make inquiries yourself.’

‘I will not believe a single thing against Mr. Duncan, and if he were here just now and asked me to marry him I would so without asking in return a single question about this girl you tell me of.’

‘You must not dream of marrying that man. You *must* make inquiries after what I have told you.’

‘Mr. Farquhar, please understand once and for all that I decline to discuss the question with you now or at any other time.’

‘Lora, darling Lora, don’t you understand,’ cried Mr. Farquhar, suddenly, leaning close to her as he spoke.

She did not answer, but gazed at him like some fascinated creature.

‘Lora, my beautiful Lora, I don’t want to be your guardian—I want your love—I want you to be my wife.’

Still Lora stood gazing with wide-opened eyes, as if hearkening to something she would have deemed impossible.

Mr. Farquhar put his arm round her waist, and before she could resist he had drawn her close to him, and was passionately kissing her lips.

‘Lora—Lora—my darling—I love you! Your sweet lips are like fire to me. Say that you love me, or I will kill myself!’

Leaning back in his arms, Lora struck him with all her strength full in the face.

‘Traitor and coward, let me go! How dare you—how dare you insult me thus!’

Farquhar staggered back, less from the force of the blow than because of the fierce struggling of the girl to get out of his arms.

She sprang away from him and across to the side of the fireplace where there was a bell,

which she rang energetically. Almost immediately a servant appeared.

‘Jane, Mr. Farquhar wants a cab called. And now good-evening, sir. I must go upstairs to see Mrs. Armitage.’

‘All right, Jane,’ said Mr. Farquhar, quietly; ‘you needn’t wait. I’ll come as soon as you have called the cab. And now, Lora——’

‘Do not call me by that name. I am Miss Armitage to you.’

‘You do wrong to despise me for loving you.’

‘I do not despise you for loving me or anyone, but I do despise you for being a liar and a coward.’

‘You take more after your father than your mother,’ was Farquhar’s rejoinder, in a bitter tone.

‘What do you know about my mother?’

‘Never mind just now. Do you refuse to listen to me, Lora?’

‘My name, I tell you again, is Miss Armitage. Yes, I do refuse.’

‘I will give you one week in which to think over things, and to change your mind if you are

wise ; at the end of that time you must decide, and as you decide so will your future be—whether you are to be rich and enjoy life, or be penniless, or next door to it. Meanwhile I shall reside at Firnie Knowe, and there I shall await your decision. Remember ! I do not threaten you—I simply advise you. Good-bye till this day week.’

‘Coward !’ was all the answer Lora vouchsafed, as Mr. Farquhar turned and left the room, his furtive smile lurking round his thin, delicate lips.

After he had gone she thought over all that had happened, but, after much consideration, she came to the conclusion that it would in every way be wiser for her to await the course of events than to try to force conclusions. She now felt convinced that, if she exposed Mr. Farquhar’s conduct, it might enable him to retaliate by a legal insistence on his rights as a guardian, while, if she did nothing in the meantime, her friends Sir John and Dr. Steele might be able to have his guardianship annulled, and her property put into Chancery, rather than remain

under his control. She determined, however, that she would let her immediate friends at any rate see that some breach had been made in the good feeling between Mr. Farquhar and herself.

While she was still thinking over all that had transpired, burning with indignation against Mr. Farquhar on account of his aspersions against her lover, and for his unjustifiable conduct towards herself, Sir John returned, and almost at the same moment his wife and daughter came in also.

‘Why, Lora dear,’ exclaimed Lady Ramsay, ‘have you been sitting here all alone? But, my dear, you have been crying—what has been the matter? Why are you so excited and so trembling, Lora?’

‘Dear Lady Ramsay, do you remember the request that Mrs. Armitage made when she came here?’

‘You mean, I suppose, as to not being asked to meet Mr. Farquhar? Yes, I do.’

‘Well, I have to ask you the same thing. I have no right to ask you to forbid him the

house, but I do request that, if he ever asks for me, the servant should tell him that I am not at home to him, and that, if he should come in to see you at any time, I may be excused leaving the room at once.'

'What has happened, Lora?' asked Sir John, eagerly.

'Mr. Farquhar has grossly insulted me—so much so that I never wish to speak to him again. He has trumped up some shameful story against Edward, and, not content with that, has wholly forgotten all honourable instincts. I do not wish to refer to the subject again, but you must see that I am in earnest. One thing I will say, however, rather than live at Firnie with my guardian, I should run away from here, disguise myself as a common woman, and obtain service as a servant somewhere. He would either kill me, or force me to marry him, or ruin my whole life—I know he would.'

'Lora, Lora, you are excited, and surely are not quite aware of what you are saying.'

'I know perfectly well what I am saying, dear Lady Ramsay, and I mean every word of

it, and more. I dare not say all I fear about Edwin Farquhar. But at present I do not wish the subject referred to any more. I am to hear from him in a week if I do not write to him myself about something we were discussing, and it will be time enough then to tell you certain things that now I prefer to leave alone.'

'By-the-by, Lora,' exclaimed Sir John, 'I must ask you one question first. As I came in just now I found a letter that had just been delivered. It is from your guardian, and in it he states that, having opened a banking account as your trustee, he will be glad to take care of the small box of family jewels which is at present deposited in my name in the Bank of Scotland, and for which, as he says, he is now responsible. He requests me accordingly to send him a written order for its removal. I think it would have been wiser, my dear, if you had not told Mr. Farquhar about those things.'

'I wish I had not, Sir John; but he was questioning me lately about what Mrs. M'Ian had left behind her, and naturally I told him all

I could, not dreaming there could be any reason against my doing so.'

'Well, what do you say?'

'I say that, if they get into Mr. Farquhar's hands, it is very doubtful if I ever see them again.'

'Then, I tell you what we will do. I shall remove the box to-morrow, and we will keep them here. You can wear them occasionally, and in the intervals I shall lock them up in the safe in my studio. They are really as secure there as in the bank. I will then write to Mr. Farquhar, telling him that the jewels in question are not in my bank, but are in your possession, and are used by you as ornaments, and that you certainly decline to hand them over to him, any more than anything else you possess. He can say nothing then.'

CHAPTER IX.

MR. FARQUHAR VISITS FIRNIE KNOWE.

THE day following his strange interview with Lora Armitage, Mr. Farquhar wrote a brief note to Mrs. Fyfe, housekeeper at Firnie Knowe, announcing that to-morrow he would arrive there for a stay of a day or two, as it was necessary he should become personally acquainted with certain details of his ward's property. In due time he left Edinburgh by the Dundee train, having first received a curt note from Sir John Ramsay couched on the terms agreed upon between the latter and Lora—a letter that did not improve his temper or make him more inclined to be courteous to Mrs. Fyfe when he reached Firnie Knowe.

Having had to wait in town longer than he anticipated before hearing from Sir John, he had been unable to reach Firnie before dark, so he saw little of the property as the gig whirled rapidly up the long avenue and stopped before the large, rambling old house.

Mrs. Fyfe, who met him at the hall-door with a polite bow and a few words of welcome, courteous, if not genial, was an elderly woman, who bore her age remarkably well. Tall, angular, but with keenly intelligent face lit up by searching grey eyes that had a constant steely glitter beneath the iron-grey hair that lay thickly above her forehead, Mrs. Fyfe was typical of the better class of east-coast country people : a woman not easily to be cheated ; shrewd, quick, caustic, trustworthy, loyal, not over companionable, and yet by no means sour or ungenial. She had been a maid to Mrs. Cameron, Lora's grandmother, just before that lady was married ; had herself married a year later, and after a few months of no great conjugal bliss had, greatly to her relief, it must be admitted, lost her too convivial husband ; had seen her

child born only to be placed in a tiny baby's coffin; had then gone as a nurse to Dunluiart, where Mrs. Cameron had first become the mother of a son, and had stayed with the household till its complete break-up after the marriage of Mona Cameron to Hew Armitage, and the death of old Mr. Cameron himself. After the departure of Hew Armitage, the wife of the head gardener had been appointed care-taker at Firnie, but as Mr. Maxwell Armitage came to visit the place more frequently, he found it was necessary to have a better class of woman at the head of the household, and so he offered the post to Mrs. Fyfe, whose former position he knew, and whom he highly respected. Though she was not an old woman, she had the national, or at any rate the east-country characteristic of having changed little in facial features from the days of early womanhood; many years and the usual sadness had, of course, left their unmistakable marks, but anyone who had known her as a young woman would find slight difficulty in recognising a former acquaintance in the person of the old housekeeper at Firnie Knowe. She had

been greatly charmed with Lora when she first saw her, though she failed to discover in her any very marked resemblance to her unfortunate mother.

‘I am Mrs. Fyfe, sir,’ she said to Mr. Farquhar, as the latter came into the hall, shivering with cold after his drive, ‘and I bid you welcome to Firnie Knowe. I hope you have had a pleasant journey from Edinburgh.’

‘Pleasant! how could it be pleasant in this infernal weather. I hate this country—people and climate alike.’

‘I am sorry for that, sir,’ replied Mrs. Fyfe, drily. ‘May I ask you how you left Miss Lora?’

‘Look here, Mrs. Dyce—or Mrs. Fyfe, I should say—please show me to my room. I’m much too cold to stand chattering here. I hope you have remembered to light a good fire?’

‘This way, sir,’ responded the offended dame, icily, and, as she spoke, she conducted the visitor to his bed-room.

While she was lighting an extra candle or two, Mr. Farquhar turned and looked at her scrutinisingly.

‘Let me see; you weren’t over at the Maxwell Armitage’s place, Heathcliffe, lately, were you? I seem to know your face, and yet I cannot recollect having seen you anywhere.’

‘No, sir, I have not been away from here, save in the village, for many months past.’

‘Ah, then, I suppose I am mistaken. I suppose my face is quite unfamiliar to you.’

Mrs. Fyfe shot a quick, searching glance in his direction, hesitated a moment, and then remarked that she did not know him.

‘I will go down now, sir, and see that your dinner is ready. Anything else I can do for you?’

‘No,’ said Mr. Farquhar, abruptly and discourteously, he being one of that class of people who can be very polite to their equals, and to their inferiors if there is some urgent reason therefor, but who generally treat those in a lower station with a disregard amounting to churlish incivility.

At dinner he several times found Mrs. Fyfe’s eyes fixed curiously upon him, he being con-

scious of the fact owing to a mirror that was at the opposite side of the room to where he was sitting.

‘Have you no servant that could wait?’ he asked, abruptly. ‘I don’t mean that I would rather you were away, but you are an old woman, and you should be resting instead of standing.’

‘There is no one else, sir, save a kitchen girl, who wouldn’t understand what to do, and the cook from the Cedars, who has come over to help me while you are here.’

‘Can’t you cook?’

‘Yes, Mr. Farquhar, I can cook.’

‘Then I would rather, after this, that you presided in the kitchen, and that the cook you speak of should wait at the table.’

‘Very good, sir,’ replied Mrs. Fyfe, at once surprised and indignant.

The dinner went on slowly. Once, as Mr. Farquhar lifted a decanter and poured out some wine into his glass, a sudden puzzled look came into the housekeeper’s keen, grey eyes, and she fixed her gaze, intently and curiously, on the face of her visitor.

The latter looked up and noticed it.

‘What the devil are you looking at? What are you staring at me like that for?’

‘I beg your pardon, sir. I am sorry I have ruffled you.’

‘Well, don’t keep staring at me in that way. I am very nervous, and can’t bear to be watched.’

A strange smile flickered about the strongly grooved lines round Mrs. Fyfe’s mouth, and she made no answer.

‘Well, didn’t you hear what I said? Why were you looking at me like that?’

‘I see so few people, sir, that I suppose I lose my manners when a stranger comes—especially if it is in any way connected with the Armitages. But I beg your pardon, Mr. Farquhar, and I will try and not offend you again.’

The visitor became suddenly mollified, and began questioning the housekeeper about the neighbourhood and then about Dundee.

‘Have you never been in Dundee, sir?’ she asked, keeping her gaze, despite her promise not to stare, fixed intently on Mr. Farquhar’s face.

‘No, never. I know almost nothing of Scotland, having spent all my life in Australia; but of course I have heard a good deal about Dundee and these parts from my poor friend Hew Armitage.’

‘You never knew Mrs. Armitage?’

‘How could I, when she died in this country before her husband crossed the seas? And now, Mrs. Fyfe, I have some letters to write. Have you the key of this escritoire here?’

‘No, sir, but Mrs. Maxwell Armitage will give it to you. Her poor husband kept the keys of all the private desks. You will find all you need in the library, sir, where I have had a fire lit.’

Here Mr. Farquhar adjourned, but he did not write any letters. He sat before the fire for an hour or more, buried in thought, occasionally marking down a number of complicated sums on a piece of paper. At last he got up, saying to himself—

‘I’ll do it before it’s too late. Better a large bite than none at all. This kind of thing could hardly always continue, but I’ll make sure of one

thing, anyway, in case I don't succeed with that beautiful she-devil, Lora. Curse her, I didn't believe that I would care to entangle myself with another woman, but that girl has touched me a bit. If—if I can succeed, what splendid openings I see before me—wealth, a beautiful wife, and then the old, wild, glorious life, but better far than before, at Homburg or Monaco. And now I'll have a smoke and then go to bed.'

At an early hour he rang the bell and informed Mrs. Fyfe that he was ready to go upstairs. She lit a candle and preceded him to the bed-room, where she bade him good-night, again scrutinising him with a strange, questioning look which she was unable to prevent, Mr. Farquhar noticing, but about which he made no remark. She had said good-night coldly, and had not proceeded far along the passage before she heard herself called back.

Mr. Farquhar had not before noticed that at the other side of the bed what he thought was a draped cupboard door was in reality a door

opening either into the passage or into another room, which he could not say, owing to the door being locked and there being no key.

‘Oh, Mrs. Fyfe, excuse me—but where does this door lead to?’

‘That one, sir? Oh, into an unused and unfurnished room. That door has been locked ever since I came here. I think the room off this was meant for a dressing-room.’

‘Haven’t you got the key of it?’

‘It is among the house-keys downstairs, sir. I can look it out.’

Mr. Farquhar was just about to make some abrupt request, but evidently felt that his conduct would seem strange, so he simply muttered a second good-night.

He had had a very varied experience of life, and he very strongly objected to sleep in a strange place whereto there were two doors, unless both were locked and fastened on the inside; and in the present instance he noted that not only was there no key to the left-hand door, but that there was no snib or bar by which to fasten it.

‘If I were in certain places I know of,’ he muttered to himself, as he yawned heavily while he undressed, ‘I wouldn’t sleep a wink till I had put something heavy against that door. But it would be too ridiculous here ; and, as for ghosts, the locks and bars would make no difference to a right-minded apparition. I wonder what that old woman kept looking at me so curiously for ? I wonder if I *have* ever seen her anywhere ? Her face is at times strangely familiar. It must have been’—and Farquhar stopped short, adding, in an ironical tone, and with a shifty smile flickering over his pale, dissipated face—‘when I was in Australia.’

But, tired as he was, it was long before he fell asleep. Either the old-fashioned chamber, with the deep shadows just perceptible owing to the clear light of the wintry moon, which came into the room in a diffused, soft sheen, kept his fancy active by assuming strange shapes, and appearing to be endued with motion ; or he had undergone excess of mental fatigue, and had so brought about that state of excited weariness which is so trying to one really tired out. But

at last he dozed off into unconsciousness, though only to be perturbed by troublesome dreams, one or two of which became so unpleasant that he awoke, cursed his folly, and grumbled himself to sleep again. Once he dreamed that he was lying asleep in a great forest, and that the man he hated and feared most in the whole world crept up close to him, and then he only woke in time to find himself calling out for mercy; but this dream seemed by no means strange to him. Strange, however, was the next. He saw the banks of a great, muddy river sweeping along between grimy wharfs and great black warehouses, and in the gloom of night a solitary figure—a woman walking along the muddy flats by the margin, and at last, throwing up her hands with a supplicating gesture, throw herself forward in the darkly-flowing tide; and as the body kept swirling round and round, it seemed to him to be constantly propelled in his direction, and that in the white deathly face he saw features he knew too well.

Again he woke, and again he turned wearily

on his pillow, cursing Firnie Knowe and all that belonged to it. But, as incoming waves gradually draw towards a climax in one larger and fuller than its predecessors, so the troubled fancies of his weary brain culminated in one last freak of the imagination. Out of the darkness of this shadowy room grew something whiter and whiter, more real, more tangible than any dream-vision that had hitherto haunted him, till at last it became a body clad in the waving vestments of the dead; long the thing stood there, till at last, with a motion horribly suggestive, it raised an arm to its shrouded face as if partaking of some draught—what draught Mr. Farquhar knew well enough, though his eyes saw nothing. He tried to scream, but the terror of his vision held him fascinated, and he lay like one in a cataleptic trance, with the fear upon him of premature burial. Then with a slow motion the shape drew back the shroud from its face—drew back the shroud from what should have been a face, but beneath which was nothing save a horrible blankness, in the midst of which burned sombrely two fiery eyes. These

eyes, how they had haunted him ; the eyes of a man not long dead, the eyes of a man self-murdered, as was said, but whose death lay hard upon the soul of another and unsuspected man.

With a shriek that rang through the empty passages of the old practically deserted house, Mr. Farquhar awoke from his sleep and the terror of his frightful vision ; but, even as he realised that he had been terrified only in slumber, his blood curdled anew as he unmistakably saw something white and shadowy pass from the side of his bed.

No coward was Mr. Farquhar, least of all a superstitious coward, but, coming upon him as it did, this waking vision perfectly paralysed him with fear ; a minute later he overcame this extremity of horror, and with a great effort sprang from his bed in the direction where he had seen the apparition.

Hark ! what was that ? an unmistakable sound, a kind of click followed by a faint rustle such as might be made by loose soft garments against hard substances. This purely human

noise, if noise it could be called, instantaneously braced his excited nerves, and he at once realised that, if some human visitor had indeed been in his room, he or she must have entered by that unbarred door to the left of his bed. With still trembling hands he struck a light and tried to pull or push back the door, but it was immovable ; stooping down, he found that the light of the candle could not be so cast as to enable him to see into the blackness of the empty room beyond, and he was just about to rise and hasten to the main door of his chamber, when, a sudden thought striking him, he took a match and thrust it into the keyhole—an action followed immediately by a clear sharp click as a key fell to the floor.

The next moment he was on his feet with a new startled expression in his eyes. Not waiting, however, to ponder over this strange appearance of a key where none had been an hour or two before, he sprang hastily to the door to the right of his bed, and, opening it, looked eagerly out into the empty darkness of the passage that led along this side of the house to the stairs

that curved towards the back of the house.

Not a sound to be heard, not a thing to be seen. Listening intently, Mr. Farquhar's ears could not even catch the echo of the light feet of some wandering mouse, though he remained stooping forward for many minutes without motion, almost as if changed into marble.

Then, convinced at last that the person, if person indeed it had been, had either got safely away, or was lying hidden somewhere near, he went softly along the corridor till he came to the first door, unmistakably the same as that which belonged to the small room adjoining his. Before opening it, he stooped to see if it were locked, and as he did so he saw at a glance that the door was unfastened though drawn closely to. Throwing it suddenly back, he held the candle high so as to cast a clear gleam of light into the room, while at the same time he remained standing in an expectant attitude, as if half prepared to meet he hardly knew what or whom.

Again no sound, no motion, no faintest sign of any living thing. Slowly and cautiously he

advanced, and, as his eyes took in all that was to be seen in the almost empty room, he saw that by no possibility could anyone be hiding there. Walking forward to the side of the second door, the same that formed the inner one in his room, he picked up the key which had fallen from the lock. Scrutinising this carefully, he noticed that it had been lately oiled, though it unmistakably bore the marks of rust from disuse. What could this signify, he thought, save one thing—that some one had been anxious to open that door without, if possible, making any sound.

His first impulse was to take it away with him, but, after a few moments' thought, he replaced it in the lock, turning it and opening the door, reclosing the latter, and leaving the key in the position it would naturally have after the door was locked. Then, shading the candle-light with his hand, he stole swiftly back by the way he had come, glancing keenly backward and forward along the corridor as he did so, and immediately afterwards regained his own room.

He was much puzzled what to make of this strange incident, but, as he found himself shivering from the extreme cold, he got into bed again, leaving the candle burning. Far more fatigued than he imagined, Mr. Farquhar, despite the excitement of this strange interruption to his rest, and by that strange perversity of the nervous system by which sleep eagerly sought seems hopelessly distant, while undesired slumber comes unexpectedly upon one, gradually lost consciousness.

How long he slept he did not know, but the candle he had left burning, which, indeed, had been near the socket when left on the mantelpiece, was out. Had it all, then, been a dream? Yes, it must have been, and at the same moment it seemed to Mr. Farquhar that his having risen and searched the adjoining room was as unreal as the dream that preceded his doing so. While trying to realise, or actually believing this fact, sleep—deep, dreamless sleep—came to him at last, and his breathing became long and regular.

But if Lora's guardian had been awake

before he dreamed that strange and terrifying vision of a poisoned man, he would have realised beyond all doubt that a visitor other than supernatural had indeed entered his room.

For, just before his excited brain had conjured up the phantasm that had startled him into wakefulness, the door of the unused room to his left had opened slowly and softly, and a tall figure, clad in a greyish robe that shrouded it from head to foot, glided noiselessly up to the side of the bed, and looked long and earnestly at the face of the sleeping man, just visible in the subdued glimmer caused by slanting beams of the moon finding their broken way between the cracks in the old-fashioned oak shutters. This midnight visitor stooped almost close to the sleeper, till he or she felt that the hot breath was already helping the latter towards his awakening, when, almost as intangible to sight in the gloom of that shadowy chamber as one of the swaying curtain-shadows themselves, the robed figure glided quickly back by the way it had come—in time to evade discovery by the now wakeful and alarmed occupant of the room.

When next morning Edwin Farquhar awoke, he did not for some time realise the events of the preceding night. But while he lay blinking at the golden mote-laden sunbeams that stole through the chinks of the shutters and lit up this and that shadowy oak-carving on wardrobe or chair, there came suddenly upon him an acute memory of all that had transpired.

A minute before he had felt still heavy with sleep, but now he felt keenly awake. Rising, he hurriedly dressed himself, having first found by the hot water at his door that Mrs. Fyfe had already summoned him, and then, quietly closing his door behind him, he went along the corridor to that of the room adjoining, which he found closed but not locked.

A noiseless turn of the hand, and it was open. Entering the room, he advanced quickly to the inner door, so as to convince himself unmistakably that a newly-oiled key was really there. To his surprise there was no key in the lock, and no sign of it on the floor.

Was it possible that he had been dreaming

this also? Hardly, it seemed to him, for this portion of what he had remembered of the night before stood out with incisive distinctness from the far more startling, but now far vaguer, horror of his disordered fancy.

He felt strangely puzzled and amazed, though he would have found it difficult to say at what exactly. Turning, at last, with an impatient gesture, he left the room, closing the door behind him as he did so, and then went downstairs to the breakfast-room.

If anyone at all had visited him during the night—and, of course, Mr. Farquhar never for a moment supposed that his slumbers had been disturbed by a supernatural presence—who else could it have been but Mrs. Fyfe?

He remembered the curious intentness of her gaze during dinner, and in his bed-room when he said good-night, and how much disturbed he had been thereby; and, by her own account, there was no one else in the house save a kitchen-maid, and a cook from the neighbouring mansion, the Cedars.

Brooding over this circumstance as he stood

awaiting an answer to the bell he had rung, he did not expect to see Mrs. Fyfe herself.

‘Ten to one,’ he exclaimed, in a low tone, ‘she will send up a message to say she has a bad headache and is confined to her bed. If she does, I shall insist on seeing her, cunning old fox that she is!’

Even while muttering these words, the breakfast-room door swung open, and Mrs. Fyfe entered with a tray, looking as trim and sternly neat as was her wont. There was absolutely no trace of discomposure in her worn, rugged face, though her manner, if anything, was even a little icier than the night before, the very natural result of the unaccustomed discourtesy which she had experienced from Mr. Farquhar.

CHAPTER X.

A DECLARATION OF WAR.

MR. FARQUHAR looked at Mrs. Fyfe keenly while acknowledging her polite, if not very genial, good-morning, but he was forced to confess to himself that not only was he surprised at her appearing at all, but at the evident indifference with which she addressed him. He noticed, however, that she no longer kept casting at him those annoying sidelong glances, probably conformably with his peevish admonition of last night. The old housekeeper was just about to leave the room when Mr. Farquhar called her back. He had determined to ask her abruptly some questions concerning the event of last night, for the more he thought of it the more

he became convinced that an actual event it had been.

‘Oh, Mrs. Fyfe, one word with you, please. I suppose it was you who were moving about last night near my room? I am a very light sleeper, and hear the least noise, and I distinctly heard some one moving in my immediate neighbourhood, at which I was surprised, after what you had told me as to no one sleeping on the first floor save myself.’

‘I heard nothing, sir,’ said Mrs. Fyfe, quietly; ‘and I think your ears must have played you a trick; or perhaps some mouse has been running about the passage or empty room, and your quick hearing has caught and magnified the sound.’

‘It was no mouse that I heard, Mrs. Fyfe, but actual flesh and blood such as you or I. Cannot you conceive who it could be? Were you not yourself in search of something you had forgotten—or, perhaps, Mrs. Fyfe,’ added Mr. Farquhar, with a scarcely concealed sneer, ‘you have a habit of walking in your sleep?’

‘Not that I know of, sir, though it may be so

for all I can tell. But I can only say again that your nerves have misled you.'

'If so, it is very strange that I should have fancied I actually saw some one—a woman, too—glide away from my bed, and, stranger still, that I should immediately thereafter hear a faint rustling sound as of some one hurriedly retreating.'

Mrs. Fyfe made no answer, but at the same time betrayed neither confusion nor even the slightest sign of interest. But when Mr. Farquhar next spoke a sudden dimness came over her steely-grey eyes, and her hand trembled perceptibly as she moved a plate further back from the edge of the table.

'But what is much the strangest of all, Mrs. Fyfe, is that, after lighting my candle, I found a key in the lock where none had been before, on the outside of the door; and you will remember my pointing this out to you before saying good-night, and your reply to the effect that the key was amongst the house-keys in a bundle downstairs. Was not this strange, my dear Mrs. Fyfe?'

‘It is strange, Mr. Farquhar,’ said the housekeeper, in a slightly tremulous voice, but with unruffled composure save for the already mentioned trembling of the hand, ‘that I should have been mistaken about the key being in the lock ; but either I or the servant who assisted me in doing up your room before you came must have left it there unwittingly.’

‘Ah, and I suppose you or the servant carefully oiled it, although what use you could have for the key at all is not very clear?’

‘Really, sir, if you’ll excuse me saying so, I don’t understand all this suspicious questioning about an old key.’

‘Mrs. Fyfe, oblige me by remaining where you are for a few moments. I want to speak to the servant ;’ and, as he spoke, Mr. Farquhar went to the side of the fireplace and rang the bell.

The housekeeper still showed no sign of being seriously disturbed, save that she grew primmer and stiffer than ever. Of the two she seemed much the less discomposed, remaining rigidly erect, and with her clear, steel-grey eyes fixed

on her new master, while the latter himself fidgetted about, and at last rang violently a second time, at the very moment the servant appeared at the door.

‘What is your name?’

‘Maggie, sir, if you please.’

‘Well, Maggie, do you remember whether the empty room next my bed-room was cleaned or even entered the day before or on the day of my arrival?’

‘No, sir; please, sir, it warn’t my fault, sir; I wasn’t told to do it.’

‘Were you not in that room at all since I came here?’

‘Only for a minute, please, sir.’

‘When was that?’

‘When you were in the library after dinner, sir. Mrs. Fyfe asked me to run up and bring down the key that was in the inner door of the empty room.’

‘What did she say when you brought it down?’

‘Please, sir, I tellt her that it was gey rusty, and that it was that stiff I could hardly get it

to lock the door; and then she tellt me to clean it, and gi'e it a guid rubbin' with oil.'

'Where do you sleep?'

'Just off the kitchen, sir.'

'Anywhere near Mrs. Fyfe's room?'

'Next door to it; her room's just ayont mine.'

'Did you hear her moving about last night?'

For the first time it seemed to dawn upon the girl that she was being arraigned in evidence against the housekeeper, and she cast a furtive glance in the direction of the latter to see if she were discomposed, or if she could gain any warning from her face. But Mrs. Fyfe was not even looking at her, her gaze being fixed with a strange intensity on Mr. Farquhar's face. The girl did not know what to say, but thought it safer to give a denial of the truth, and she had just begun a somewhat stammering reply, when her interrogator interrupted her with a sharp admonition to speak the truth, after which she felt too terrified to do anything else than state the fact.

'I'm feart o' ghaists, sir, and I allus sleep wi'

my door aff the sneck, and last nicht I was feeling gey nervous. I was jist droppin' asleep agin after tossing about a lang time, when I heard a sound in the passage, and sat up in my bed. I could just catch sight o' a tall figure hurrying past my door, but the next meenit I heard the door next me locked, and I knew then that it was only Mrs. Fyfe.'

'Did you say nothing to Mrs. Fyfe this morning?'

'No, sir; I had clean forgotten all about it.'

'That will do, Maggie. You are an intelligent girl, and I won't forget you. You may go now.'

When the girl had gone, Mr. Farquhar waited a moment or two, and then swiftly crossed the room to the closed door, which he suddenly opened, with the result that Maggie, who had been leaning against it with her ear pressed close to the keyhole, fell forward into the room.

Instead of taking the girl's natural curiosity in more or less good part, Mr. Farquhar's violent

temper got the better of him, and he gave her a kick that made her spring to her feet and run off in a transport of mingled shame, pain, and indignation.

‘And now, Mrs. Fyfe, I presume you will no longer strive to deny that it was you who gained access to my room last night?’

‘I decline to answer any question, Mr. Farquhar, after the way in which you have catechised that girl before my face—after the way you have just behaved to her—and for your general manner towards myself.’

‘Mrs. Fyfe, how much do you get a year for doing nothing here?’

‘My salary as housekeeper and sub-manager of the house property is fifty pounds a-year.’

‘It’s forty-five too much,’ said Mr. Farquhar, insolently; ‘and how are you paid?’

‘Quarterly.’

‘When is your next payment due?’

‘In a month from to-day.’

‘Well, at the end of the month I will pay you the amount due, also the next quarter in advance, and then don’t let me find you linger-

ing about here an hour after your service ends, or you'll hear about it in a way you won't relish. I won't give you a "character."

'Thank you,' interrupted Mrs. Fyfe, ironically.

'Don't add more impertinence to your previous insolence, woman! Do you hear? I give you a month's warning, and if I have the slightest cause to complain again I will pay you off at a day's notice.'

'Very good, Mr. Farquhar. I am quite willing to abide your judgment. Many things happen in a month.'

'What do you mean?'

'I only said that many things happened in a month. For instance, poor Maxwell Armitage was in the prime of vigorous life the week before you paid him your visit, and about a week later he was ruined and—poisoned. They called it suicide.'

'Look here, my good woman, what are you driving at?'

For the first time Mrs. Fyfe began to realise that she must be careful not to inflame her visi-

tor's anger further. There was an ominous gleam in his dark eyes, a sombre light that betokened fierce resentment.

‘Mean, sir? I mean nothing more than I say. A month’s as long as a year to a dead man, as we say hereabouts, and more may happen to any of us in a month than in a score of ordinary years.’

‘Well, clear out now, and for the rest of the time I am here let Maggie attend to me.’

When Mr. Farquhar had finished his breakfast, he was surprised to see Mrs. Fyfe appear in the room again.

‘I thought I had told you——’

‘I beg your pardon, sir, but I just wanted to speak to you for a moment. Maggie will attend to you as you requested, and Mary Tait, the cook, can safely be left in charge of the house as well as the kitchen. If I am to leave here in a month, it is necessary that I make some arrangements for my impending change: so if I could go to Edinburgh for a day I should be much obliged to you.’

‘I suppose you want to go and persuade Miss

Lora to interfere on your behalf, and tell her a tissue of lies into the bargain?’

‘Can I go, sir, if you please—either to-day or to-morrow?’

‘No, you can’t. You have done nothing to merit my consideration—so I will not permit you to leave Firnie Knowe till your time is up. I am only to be here for a few days longer, but if I hear of your taking advantage of my absence I will send you about your business without the least delay, and without a farthing of wages beyond that to which you are legally entitled.’

‘I am sorry, Mr. Farquhar, that you couldn’t have behaved more generously to an old servant. However, I won’t trouble you again.’

Throughout the greater part of the day, Lora’s guardian inspected the house and grounds, mentally calculating the realisable value of all he saw. The sky had long threatened snow, and at last the great white flakes began to come down, and that gradual twilight, characteristic of those dull, late winter afternoons when the snow-gloom covers the land, set in.

Mr. Farquhar was walking past the gardener's lodge, but turned homeward as the drift became stronger and the cold more penetrating. As he did so, he caught sight of a small figure running across the meadow that intervened between the avenue and the hedgerows of the branch road to the small Firnie station. He recognised the lad as one he had seen the day before, little Alick Fraser, the son of the stableman.

‘Hi, there, Alick!’ he called out, and the boy came running towards him, touching his hat as he approached, and stopping short with a funny little reverential bob of the head.

‘Where are you off to, my boy?’

‘Please, surr, I’m gaun to the station to post a letter.’

‘I thought the letters only went away once a day—at lunch time; and I have already sent off all mine in the bag.’

‘It’s one that Mistress Fyfe’s forgotten; surr. She tellt me to run wi’ it to the station, and it wad be in time for the afternoon train.’

‘Where is it for? Let me see the letter.’

The boy handed it to him, and Mr. Farquhar

read the address—‘Miss Lora Armitage, 13, Grant Square, Edinburgh.’

‘I’m going on to the station myself, so I’ll take it for you. Where were you going after posting it?’

‘Please, surr, I was goin’ to Firnie—Firnle village, ye ken. I stay there wi’ my grannie for the schoolin’, an’ only gang up to Firnie Knowe yince a week or so, and sometimes no for a fortnicht. I was here on a message frae the schuillmaster when I seed ye yesterday.’

‘Well, Alick, you run straight back to Firnie, and here’s a sixpence to buy sweeties with. And look here, you had better not tell Mrs. Fyfe that you did not post her letter, or she will give it you hot. I am thinking that she wants to give you a scolding at any rate.’

The lad stood in evident awe of the stern old housekeeper, and seemed relieved to find the new ‘laird’ on his side.

‘Deed I’ll no, surr,’ he exclaimed, grinning; ‘an’ if she speers at me I’ll jist say I posted it my ainsel.’

‘Right you are, and now cut along, or you

won't get to the sweetie-shop at Firnie till it's dark.'

Mr. Farquhar placed Mrs. Fyfe's letter in his pocket, but as soon as little Alick Fraser was out of sight he turned back in the direction of the house instead of going on to the station as he had declared he was about to do.

When he reached the library he sat down beside the lamp-lit table and leisurely opened the epistle he had intercepted.

'Dear Miss Lora,' it ran, 'please consider this letter strictly private, in the meantime at any rate. You will know that your guardian, Mr. Farquhar, is here at present. I want you to tell me frankly if you have any reason to dislike him, or if you mistrust him, or if you would rather he were not your guardian. I have a special reason for asking, but I will not enlarge upon the subject here, except to say that I once knew Mr. Farquhar under a different name. If you wish to hear further from me, please send me a line to that effect, *addressed under cover to John Headrick, Head Gardener,*

Firnie Knowe, as Mr. Farquhar both fastens up and unlocks the letter-bag here, though this is a matter I have always been accustomed to attend to myself. I have had this note posted by hand. I won't be able to get up to town for a month yet; so if you think there is no necessity for you to discuss the matter with me, (though I trust you will not put me down as merely a suspicious and interfering old woman,) simply take no notice of this letter, and I will give you such explanations as you want when I next see you. I may be doing great injustice to Mr. Farquhar, for, though what I know of him many, many years ago under a different name did not redound to his credit, he may have quite changed since then. Personally I do not at all fancy him, but that's not to the point. I may mention, however, that he has given me a month's notice to leave his and your service, which, so far as you are concerned, I deeply, very deeply, regret. If, however, you wish me to come and see you, I will do so the day after Mr. Farquhar leaves, though he informed me (when I asked for leave to get

away for a day—as I would have preferred speaking to you than writing) that if he learned I absented myself at all from Firnie Knowe, he would dismiss me on the moment.

‘Respectfully, Yours obediently,

‘JOANNA FYFE.’

Mr. Farquhar read this letter through two or three times, and then slowly tore it up into a number of little pieces, throwing them on to the fire before him, and watching their swift transposition into ash with that furtive, flickering smile which Lora had on more than one occasion noticed with instinctive dislike.

‘H’m, it puzzles me to think what that old woman’s after. What the devil can she mean? She once knew me under a different name—that’s not affording me much clue, having had no small variety in my time. What a fool I was not to find out all about her when I first came. I had the impression, somehow, that she had been put in by that good-natured idiot, Maxwell Armitage. She could not possibly have been here at *that* time—at least, I have not the faint-

est recollection of her. Wish I hadn't been so hasty in telling her not to speak to me again while I was here. Let me see, I think the best thing for me to do will be to look in to-morrow on Headrick, the gardener, and see if he can give me any information. There's one thing pretty certain, if I'm not greatly mistaken, and that is that I shall be allowed to have a good sleep this night, anyhow, for I guess the old lady will hardly risk another midnight inspection.'

Immediately after breakfast next morning—and, as Mr. Farquhar had surmised, after a quite undisturbed night's rest—he went along the avenue to the south lodge, and gave some general directions to Headrick.

'By-the-by, Headrick, how long have you been here?'

'Weel, sir, man and boy, I've been here aboot forty year—I was here afore Mr. Hew Armitage came into the property at all, and have remained ever since.'

'Ah, and I suppose you and Mrs. Fyfe are great cronies, for if I mistake not she

also has been a long time in the connection ?

‘Weel, sir, between you and me and the wa’, I canna say that Mrs. Fyfe ‘and mysel’ are jist the best o’ freends—not that I dinna respect her greatly, for she is a good, sterlin’ woman—but she’s no companionable, you see, and I dinna ha’e owre muckle o’ her company.’

‘Let me see, now : was she at Firnie Knowe during Hew Armitage’s time ?’

‘No, sir, it was not till a year or more after Mr. Armitage’s disappearance that she was made housekeeper here, partly because of Mr. Maxwell Armitage’s interest in her, but mostly on account of her connection with poor Mrs. Armitage’s family. Did ye know them at all, sir ? Cameron was the name.’

‘Cameron, did you say ? Let me see ; what Camerons were they ?’

‘Oh, the laird was Mr. Cameron, a famous shipbuilder in Dundee, but better known hereabouts as Cameron of Dunluiart. It was his daughter, Mona, that became the wife of Hew Armitage, and from Miss Mona’s young days up to her marriage Mrs. Fyfe was housekeeper at

Dunluiart. I mind me now that she left her place rather less than a year before Mrs. M'Ian did, and Mrs. M'Ian, ye know, was the nurse of Miss Mona as a child, and many years later was the person to whom she entrusted her little daughter, the same as is now Miss Lora, whom I hope we will see over us all here in good time. It won't be long now, for she must be close on her twenty-first birthday.'

'Yes, I too hope we'll see her here in good time, but she won't be your mistress for another four years, because, owing to her father's will, she is not to come into her property till she is twenty-five. Till then, Headrick, you will have to consider me as your master.'

While Mr. Farquhar was residing at Firnie Knowe, and making thorough acquaintance with innumerable details, nothing new had occurred in the household at Grant Square. The more Lora had thought over her guardian's extraordinary conduct, the more she became convinced that she could have nothing to do with him save what was absolutely necessary

owing to the legal position he held as the trustee over her fortune. Lady Ramsay, seeing the girl's great aversion to speak on the subject at present, pressed her no further after Lora succinctly told her that under no possible circumstances could she be induced to pass even a single night under Mr. Farquhar's charge. Naturally both she and Sir John were surprised at this marked change of front, remembering, as they did, that Lora had invariably upheld the character and person of her guardian; but they had so many new anxieties of their own, owing to the disastrous collapse of Maxwell Armitage's business, that they had little time to ponder overmuch on the altered course of events which had been brought about. Lora let the days of the appointed week go past without writing or thinking of writing to Mr. Farquhar. She was determined to let him take the initiative at present, at any rate.

On the morning of the day on which her letter of surrender ought to have reached her guardian, all thoughts concerning him and his threats were driven out of her mind by a wholly

unexpected, and, to her, joy-bearing letter from Edward Duncan. In this he informed her how he had gained strength surprisingly, even after being at sea so short a time as one week (and of course he attributed his rapid recovery entirely to the knowledge of her love), and how he had been persuaded by the doctor on board to try the effects of the Cape climate instead of going on to Australia, the chance being afforded to him by the fact of the vessel having to put into Cape Town *en route*. Here he had been a week, and already felt that he had no longer any excuse for prolonging his voyage, and that he would therefore stay two or three weeks longer in Cape Colony, and then sail for home.

‘I will thus be with you in the spring instead of the late summer, as we had both thought would be the case; so any day after the last of March you may expect to see me turning up in Edinburgh.’

Lora read and re-read the many pages of his letter, but for a long time all she distinctly realised was the happy fact that he would be home months earlier than she had anticipated.

Although she had never admitted it to herself, she had experienced a growing dread of Mr. Farquhar, especially after the animosity he had shown against her lover, and she could not at times help feeling a vague fear that somehow or other her guardian would come between her and Edward Duncan. But now that Edward was coming home all would be well. If the worst came to the worst, he and she might get married and go away from her guardian and his influence, and manage quite well without even the personal allowance which at present was paid to her. Her news was good news also to the whole Ramsay family, for by every member thereof Edward Duncan was greatly liked and admired.

The dinner-party that evening at Grant Square was a livelier one than most of its predecessors for some time past, and even Lady Ramsay, who, despite her hitherto happy experience of life, was by no means inclined to take a roseate hue of things in general, laughed as freely and frankly, thought Lora, as she used to do in the happy days at Oban. The circle

had just broken up in various directions when a servant came into the drawing-room and announced to Miss Armitage that Mr. Farquhar was downstairs in the hall, but that she had not shown him into the library on account of her instructions—moreover, that she had told him Miss Armitage had given implicit directions that under no circumstances could she consent to receive him.

‘I told him so more than once, miss, but he told me to let you know that he was here, and he begged me to inform you that your granting a few moments’ interview was urgent.’

On any previous day Lora would distinctly have refused to grant this request, but this evening she felt so exuberantly glad and confident that she experienced almost no repugnance at the idea of again meeting Mr. Farquhar alone.

Seeing her hesitate, Sir John asked if she would care for him to accompany her, an offer, however, which she declined, though she added that she would be glad if he would come the moment he heard the bell rung.

When she entered the library, into which the servant had already ushered the visitor, she bowed haughtily, but, seeing that her guardian stood close to the fireplace, she did not advance further than the outer edge of the table.

‘Lora,’ began Mr. Farquhar, ‘I——’

‘I have already requested you, Mr. Farquhar, to call me Miss Armitage.’

‘You surely forget, Lora, that I am your guardian, the representative of your father, the nearest connection you have in the world. But I have not called here to bicker about trifles of this kind. You are aware, I presume, that the period I gave you for consideration has elapsed, and elapsed without my having heard from you?’

‘Well?’

‘I now wish to know exactly what you intend doing.’

‘That is exactly what *I* want to know, Mr. Farquhar—what *you* intend doing.’

‘Lora, is it impossible, absolutely impossible, that you can agree to the proposal I made to you a week ago?’

‘My best answer to that is to inform you that Mr. Edward Duncan will be here sooner than I expected, and that, guardian or no guardian, he would not think twice about chastising you for the way you have behaved, if I see fit to tell him of it. Have I again to remind you that, before long, he will be my husband?’

At these words Mr. Farquhar suddenly advanced, saying as he did so,

‘Lora, my dear child, let me shake your hand.’

Lora stared at him in astonishment, which the next moment gave way to her old indignation.

‘How dare you approach me again after what passed between us that night when I was forced to have you sent away from the house?’

‘My dear,’ said Mr. Farquhar, quite composedly, ‘I have had a trying part to play, but at last it is at an end. I am truly and heartily rejoiced to see how well you have come out of the test to which I had to put you. Yes, you need not look so surprised; your poor father—God bless him, dear fellow!—made me promise

to put you through this ordeal, if it so happened that, when I found you, you were engaged to be married. If you had not remained true to your lover, I was to have been far more stringent with you during the intervening years between now and your succession to the property.'

'And did my father tell you to slander an innocent man and to grossly insult a defenceless girl?'

'You put it too strongly, my dear; you should remember I am a man well up in years, and one who would fain become a second father to you. Perhaps I have been clumsy, but I saw no other way to carry out your father's wish than to speak against Mr. Duncan and behave as I did.'

'I do not believe you were acting, Mr. Farquhar,' said Lora, quietly and firmly. 'But for the moment let that pass. You will now, of course, if what you say is true, be quite willing to grant the following:—The money I asked for on behalf of Mrs. Maxwell Armitage, of the housekeeper at Heathcliffe, and for my board here; also, you'll advance me, I presume, an

adequate allowance if Mr. Duncan should ask me to marry him soon after his return.'

'I shall do my utmost to meet your wishes in every respect. I promise you this, Lora.'

'You distinctly agree to grant me these three requests, and without modification?'

'Yes, yes, my dear child, I have already promised you, and you can rely on my word. But you will understand, I am sure, that there are certain formal preliminaries that must be gone through in the case of raising any large amounts under trust. So, while I will do all in my power to carry out your wishes, I will have to ask you to be patient for a little while yet. For one thing, there are other sums urgently demanding realisation.'

'For instance, I presume,' said Lora, ironically, 'Mr. Farquhar, the ten thousand pounds which was mentioned in my father's will as your legacy.'

But, before her guardian had time to reply, the door opened and Sir John came into the room.'

'I beg your pardon if I am intruding, but I

wish to have one word with you, Mr. Farquhar, in presence of Miss Armitage here. I may be doing you a gross injustice, but Dr. Steele and myself have decided to legally protest against your assumption of the control of Miss Armitage's affairs. We may or may not be successful in this, but in any case, and because of our interest in Miss Armitage, we think this the wisest course to pursue.'

'Are you not a little late in making this move, Sir John?' asked Mr. Farquhar, politely; 'you perhaps forget that I have legally assumed guardianship, and have already exercised my functions as trustee—and possession, you know, is nine points of the law. But I have a perfect right to demand an explanation of your extraordinary conduct—I say of *your* conduct, for I do not recognise Dr. Steele's right to have a say in the matter at all.'

'I can say nothing more, Mr. Farquhar, than that I am acting for the sake of my dear friend, Miss Armitage, here—acting as I think best in every way; and, as for Dr. Steele, he was the late Mr. Hew Armitage's oldest friend, and, knowing

him as he did, he feels assured that the Hew Armitage who wrote the document you delivered to us was not the Hew Armitage whom *he* knew.'

'I call this most insulting, and I certainly decline to withdraw from the exercise of my just right until legally forced to do so. Further, in the event of a legal decision being in my favour, I will bring an action for defamation of character against Dr. Steele and yourself.—Lora!' exclaimed her guardian, suddenly, 'do *you* approve of this conduct on the part of Sir John Ramsay—do you mistrust your father's old friend, the man who succoured him in his dire need, and who remained loyal and generous to him from the time when you were but an infant to the day of his death?'

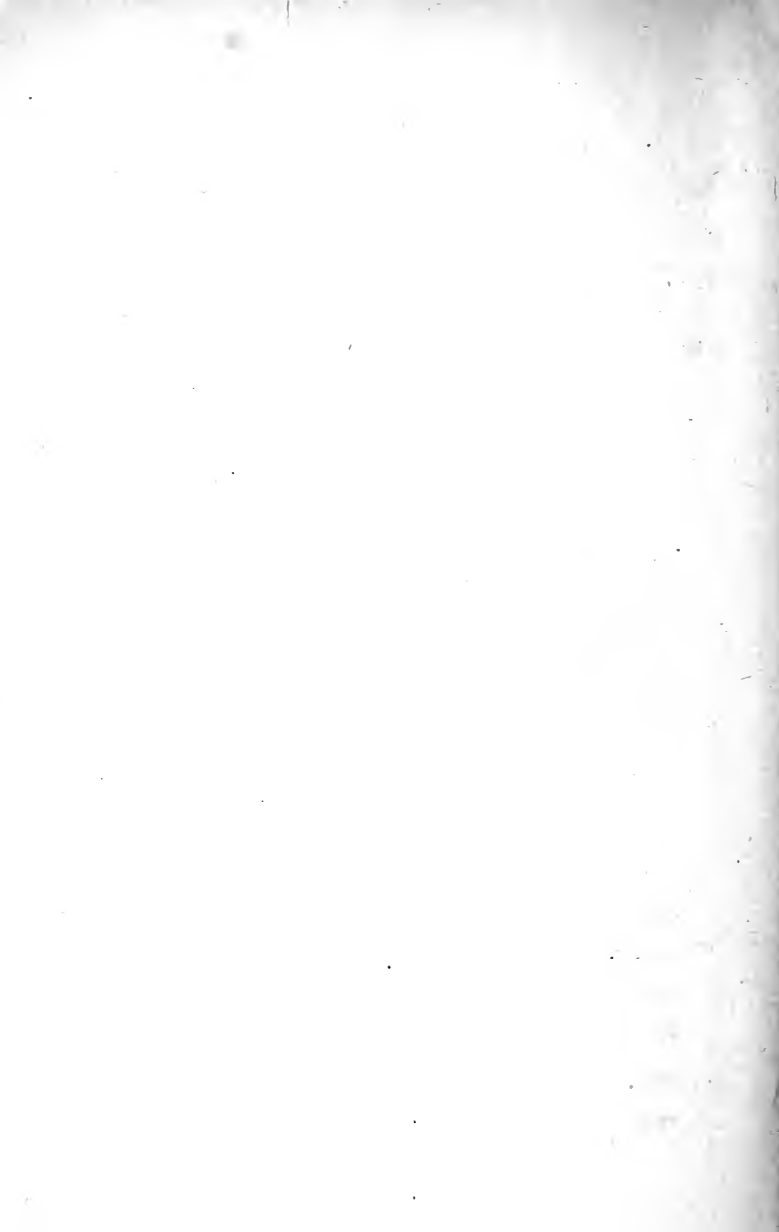
'Whatever Sir John Ramsay and Dr. Steele think right in this matter, I am willing to approve; I know neither is capable of real discourtesy, and equally I know that neither would take upon themselves the responsibility they speak of without what they considered ample justification.'

Suddenly Mr. Farquhar forgot all his suavity and self-restraint, and turned round to his ward with a savage exclamation.

‘Is it to be open war, then, between us?’ he demanded, ‘for, if so, you will have the worst of it! I am not a man to be trifled with; I would rather be your friend than your enemy, but if you won’t have me for your friend, then I have no other resource left than to be your bitter opponent. Once more, I ask you, is it to be war or not between us?’

‘War,’ said Lora, scornfully and decisively, as she turned and left the room, an action that was followed by Sir John’s holding back the door with a low bow as his unwelcome visitor strode abruptly from the library, and thence out at the great hall door.

BOOK THE FOURTH.



CHAPTER I.

CONGER COVE AGAIN.

FOR many a year was that awful night remembered, the night of the terrific storm that swept along the western coasts of England and Ireland, nowhere more furiously or with direr results than on those wild Cornish coasts of which Conger Cove was one of the most exposed outlying harbours.

It will be remembered that with utmost difficulty, and mainly owing to the noble gallantry of a fisherman called Garth Trendall, one man alone was rescued from among those hurled into the raging seas which wrought wildest havoc with the vessel that had rushed upon the outlying reefs of Conger Cove.

At the very moment that Trendall had secured his footing, with the man he had saved in his arms, something fell from the nude body of the latter. One man only saw this, Jasper Polgarth by name, and, with the swiftness of a pelican seizing an alarmed fish, he had swooped his arm through the first fierce turmoil of the resurge and grasped the object as it was just about to be whirled out seaward.

Even the great strength of Garth Trendall had given way under the strain to which he had been put, and he lay beside the man whom he had saved, if indeed life still lingered in the latter, as inanimately as any corpse.

While one or two kept watch to see if, perchance, any other unfortunate should by good fortune be washed ashore, the rest of the fishermen crowded round the two recumbent figures, and at last a cry of delight came from them as, under the stimulus of some strong French brandy that had never paid duty, Trendall opened his eyes and seemed to instantaneously regain consciousness and vigour.

‘Never mind me, men, I’m all right. Look

after this poor chap, if he be still alive. Carry him up to my place; my Mary will see to him, and do all mortal woman can do.'

'You must go yourself, too, Garth,' said old Ivo Marshall, his father-in-law; 'you're not fit to be out in this wild night any longer after all you've gone through.'

'I'm not the man to leave my duty, Ivo Marshall, and as long as I'm able to stick to my duty I'll do so.'

Some four or five men, including old Ivo, lifted the nude body of the castaway, threw something round it, and carried it to Trendall's cottage with such speed as the furious tempest would permit.

Just as they were about to depart with their unconscious burden, Trendall turned round to ask if there was a belt still round the man's body.

'No; there's not even a tattoo-mark on him,' was the reply, with grim literalness.

'Look about, men, and see if you can find a belt on the shore. If it hadn't been for that belt, I don't believe it would have been possible

for me to keep a hold of him ; but I remember now that I felt it give way at the last moment. It may have contained all that the poor fellow most valued, and I hope it's not lost for good.'

Perhaps the frightful clamour of the shrieking and howling wind, and the thunder of the whirling billows among the echoing rocks along the booming sands, prevented Jasper Polgarth hearing what his companion said ; anyhow, he made no answer, but, after looking earnestly seaward for a few moments, turned and joined the small party who were about to carry away the rescued man.

Meanwhile the castaway, who had been carried to the Trendalls' cottage, lay in a deep swoon, tended by Mrs. Trendall, while her husband was locked in heavy slumber. Seeing Garth still asleep, worn out with his great exertions, and the castaway apparently as deep in his stupor as ever, Mary Trendall ran into her father's cottage and joined in the hymn of thanksgiving which many there, to their honour be it said, sang with genuine emotion even in the midst of what to them meant dire

loss. When she returned she found the rescued man lying in the same position as before, but with wide-open, vacant eyes gazing straight up at the rafters above him.

‘God be thanked, sir, you’ve been spared to come to life again—for one may well say that you’ve been dead and come alive again.’

‘What has happened to me?’ was moaned out, in a feeble, tremulous voice.

‘Why, don’t you know, my good man, that you’ve been wrecked in the awfulest gale that ever raged along these coasts, and that my husband saved you at the risk of his own precious, noble life. There are not many Garth Trendalls I think,’ said the woman, proudly.

‘When did this happen?’—but so feebly was the question asked that the person addressed could hardly catch the words.

‘Why, only last night. Do you think you’ve been in a fever? You’ve only been dazed a bit, but will soon be all right again. You may thank God you’re alive. It’s little short of a miracle how you reached the Slice at all.’

The man looked at her vaguely, evidently not at all taking in the import of her words.

‘Look here, my man, you’re dazed still,’ cried the woman, a little impatiently ; ‘just turn over on your side again and take another spell o’ sleep.’

The man did as he was told with that unquestioning obedience characteristic of one in great weakness, but a strangely puzzled look kept in his open eyes for the few minutes ere he again lost consciousness.

It was an hour or more after dark when Garth Trendall awoke, and, against his wife’s request, insisted on sitting up for an hour or so, though he felt stiff and weary after his long battle against the tempest on the Beacon Cliff and in the surging waters of the Slice.

While the two were sitting before the kitchen fire, and talking in low tones about the stranger in the room adjoining, old Ivo Marshall came in to see if his son-in-law were yet up.

‘Glad to see ye out o’ bed, Garth, my boy. I hopes your none the worse o’ all ye’ve gone through?’

‘None the worse, thank you, kindly. But my heart is sore for these poor fellows out on the Tongue, about whom Mary has been telling me ; though I am bound to say I don’t see how we could have done anything to save them.’

‘Ay, ay, true enough, lad. Last night’ll long be remembered in St. Aphra. You’ve come off as easy as anyone, Garth ; only the boat in which you had a fourth share being smashed. Your own *Staff o’ Life*’ (for by this quaint name Trendall’s largest fishing smack was known) ‘and the *Dancing Wave* are all right, or have only suffered very slight damage. Poor Jabez Birrell has lost everything, and so has Arthur Penruddock and his brother John, and so has Congryff and Smithson, and the two Tremaines—but the worst sufferers of all are young Tretower and Jasper Polgarth, who have lost absolutely everything. It’s true that young Tretower’s loss is not so serious—for he’s a young man and single, and has, moreover, his old granddad, Peller Tretower, to fall back upon ; whereas poor Polgarth is married, and has two children, and, in addition to losing his smack

and all his fishing gear, has had his cottage blown in.'

'Poor fellow. What's he doing just now?'

'His wife's in wi' Susan Trenery, where she's to stay till something can be done wi' the cottage. Edith Webb has taken the two children in the meantime—God bless her kindly soul! As for Polgarth himself, I'm afraid he's trying to forget his troubles at Dick Trelawney's.'

'That's worse news than of his wall blowin' in,' remarked Trendall, sadly. 'A wall can be built up again, but it's more difficult to shake off the craving for drink. It's queer, too, for Polgarth, though a bit inclined that way before his marriage, has been steady ever since; an' it's surely the very worst thing to do, when you're laid flat wi' misfortune, to go and spend your last farthing wi' what will only stupefy you further. It's very sad, raal sad.'

'Well, I must be goin' now, Garth. I only looked in to see if you and the stranger was better. Good-night, my lad; I'll look in to-morrow and see you, an' talk over what's to be

done wi' the poor chap i' the next room. Good-night, Mary, my dear.'

'Garth dear, you're not going out again, surely?' said the latter, anxiously, as she saw him rise and follow her father.

'Yes, Mary, I'm going round to Trelawney's, to see if I can help Jasper Polgarth a bit. I'll be back before long, my lass, so don't worry.'

The door of the Polgarths' cottage, as well as the western wall, had been blown in, and now only a smack's sail had been fastened up against the entrance. Thrusting this aside, Trendall stepped into complete darkness, but, as he took another step forward, the door of the inner room opened suddenly, and a voice called out angrily to know who was there.

'What! you, Garth Trendall? What do you want?'

'I came to see you, Jasper Polgarth, for I heard what evil things had happened to you, and how even the shelter of your home has been denied to your wife and children.'

'I thank you for your sympathy, Garth Trendall, but I am not in such desperate plight as you seem to imagine.'

‘Well, I am glad to hear that, anyhow, though I was assured that you had lost everything in your possession. However, since I’m here, I may as well come in and have a chat with you, and, if I can help you otherwise, let me know.’

All this time they had been standing in the darkness of the unlit, half-ruined kitchen, and the gleam coming from the open door of the inner room showed that, at any rate, there was brightness of some kind therein.

‘Thank you, Trendall,’ replied Polgarth, suddenly, ‘but I do not want your assistance.’

Trendall looked at the speaker curiously, surprised at the unwonted incivility of a man with whom he had always been on very fair terms.

‘Well, to tell the truth,’ he added, lightly, ‘I’ve got a shivering attack on me, and would like to come in just for a minute, and have a drop of something before going out in this bitter cold again.’

‘I’ve neither fire nor spirits to give you, Garth Trendall, and now wish you good-night.’

‘Why, Polgarth, my man, what’s come over you? You never used to be like this!’

‘Why the devil don’t you let me be!’ exclaimed the man, savagely, losing the control he had hitherto striven to retain. ‘What right have you or anyone else to come bothering here when you’re not wanted? I suppose you think I’m up to something, and want to find out what it is.’

‘You do me wrong, Jasper; I’ve sought you out to-night from amongst many friends, because I heard you had suffered most. I came to tell you that what little help I can give you I am willing to do—not only with my hands, but I’ll give you a berth aboard the *Dancing Wave*, and, if that’s not enough, we’ll see if I can’t lend you a little money to tide over your misfortunes.’

The man hesitated for a moment, and was manifestly about to accept his visitor’s generous offer, when his eye caught the gleam of the light of the inner room, and he turned away as if trying to resist some impulse, good or evil.

‘You’re a good man, Garth Trendall, and I

thank you for your offer, but I tell you again I don't need the help of you or any other man. When I do I'll ask you.'

'It may be too late then,' said Trendall, turning as he spoke and walking rapidly back in the direction of his own cottage.

Polgarth followed him to the doorway, and watched his figure receding through the darkness; then, turning inward again, he carefully fastened up the sail that had been half-torn down, and with utmost speed shoved into his inner pocket a small package. Then, lifting up a broken slab of stone near the fire-place, he shoved something like a belt in below it, and stamped the stone down again into its original position, finally pulling over it one end of a heavy sea-chest. Having put out the light, he pinned a piece of paper, on which he had already written some words, to the wall, where they would catch the eye of anyone entering, and then went softly out into the night, and struck off in the direction of Ortho. The written message was merely to say that he had gone into Ortho for money that was owing

to him, and that he would be back in the course of the next day.

This being so, why was it that Jaspar Polgarth kept glancing furtively behind him every now and then, either as if his superstitious fears had been aroused, or as if that worst of all spectres, his conscience, would not let him pursue his way in peace?

While Jasper Polgarth tramped over the cliffs towards Ortho, the wearied inhabitants of St. Aphra slept soundly. Among the first to awake was Mary Trendall, anxious about her husband, and also about the poor castaway in the next room. A glance showed her that Garth was sleeping the slumber of fatigue, and not of illness, so, having dressed herself quietly, she went into the next room to see if perchance the stranger should be awake and hungry. As she half-expected, she found him lying with wide-open eyes, and was pleased by the look of recognition that came into them upon her entry.

‘Did you say that I had been wrecked, or have I dreamt it?’

‘No, it’s true,’ replied Mrs. Trendall, in a surprised tone; ‘can’t you remember yet that you were recently aboard a ship?’

‘I remember nothing,’ said the stranger, quietly, with a pathetic look in his eyes. ‘I know nothing save that I am lying in a bed in a strange room, and am tended by a kindly but strange person.’

‘Dear me, my good sir,—for I see you’re a gentleman by your speech—surely you know where you came from?’

‘I do not know where I came from—nor how I came, nor whither I am bound, and, alas, not even what my name is.’

Instead of being greatly surprised, a look like a shadow stole over Mary’s fair face! the thought coming into her mind that this man must, indeed, have something about himself he was eager to conceal, since he should endeavour to gain his ends by such a strange, and, to her, improbable story.

But it so came about that the stranger found a home at the cottage of the Trendalls.

Day after day went past without the faintest

return of memory coming to the unfortunate man—the past was an absolute *tabula rasa*, on which no impression remained. Trendall and others of the fishermen tried by many means to start some clue that would enable him to thread even one of the mazy by-ways of memory, but with no other result than sorely perplexing the stranger.

It was not long ere Garth Trendall discovered that his uninvited guest was a man far superior to any whom he had ever met; and when, after a fortnight had passed without any reminiscence coming to the latter—and he had that morning expressed his intention of no longer burdening his kind friends, but of wandering inland—Trendall took him aside and made a suggestion, which the good sense of the stranger made him adopt at once.

‘First and foremost, sir, you’re not to leave us till your memory comes back again. You’d be no better off in Ortho, or even in Truro, than here, for, the bigger the place is, the smaller’s the charity of those that live in it. Now, I and the others have been thinking that you might

make us some return for what we've been able to do for you.'

'What you yourself have been able to do, you mean.'

'Well, well, that may be; but the proposal is this: That you should stay with us, that is, with my wife and myself, and that you should act as schoolmaster here—for our children get no schooling save in the summer months, excepting what they get from their own parents, which is mighty little. Everyone in St. Aphra is willing and able to pay a small amount for this purpose, and out of this fund you may be able to save enough to help you some day to getting away from here whenever your memory returns.'

The stranger took Trendall's hand in his own, pressed it gratefully, and answered, simply,

'I will only too gladly do this thing.'

CHAPTER II.

MR. STRANGWAYS FINDS OUT WHAT THE INITIALS
'H. A.' STAND FOR.

MONTHS and years elapsed and brought little change to the people of St. Aphra—or rather, it should be said, no perceptible change; for slowly and surely a new influence permeated the spiritual atmosphere of the place. The old, perhaps, felt it most, and they all knew that they owed much of this new peace to Mr. Strangeways. For by this name they had elected to call him, and he had willingly adopted it.

As the most unfamiliar thing loses its strangeness sooner or later, so ere a very long period had elapsed the fisher-folk of St. Aphra ceased

to speculate as to the antecedents of Mr. Strangers, and finally came to cease wondering if he would ultimately regain his memory or not.

One day, some ten years after he had settled down as the schoolmaster of St. Aphra, Garth Trendall ventured to speak to him on his private affairs.

‘You have lived so very quietly, sir, and what with the money you have laid by from teaching, and from the sale of drawings to summer visitors at Ortho, you must have enough to pay your way to London, and there, I suppose, you would find some one who knew you. I’m saying this for your own sake, and, Heaven knows, sorely against my own wish and that of all St. Aphra. But I’m afraid you’re ailing here, and that doing your duty in the noble way you do is not enough for you, since it is not that duty to which you were naturally called.’

‘I have often thought of going away, Trendall; and yet why should I? Suppose that I were to find out something about my past (though hardly in London, my friend—where my effort would be something like looking for

a ring I had dropped into mid-ocean), it might only bring back great suffering and sorrow. It is strange that, though I can recollect nothing, I am quite convinced that my life was no happy one. What makes me eager to know all, sometimes, is the fear that wrong or sorrow may be the portion of some one whose burden would be lighter if I, in my right person, so to speak, were even now to be able to declare myself. On the whole, it is wiser for me not to trouble myself too much. I am old-fashioned enough to believe with you, Trendall, that our lives are in great part moulded for us, sometimes mainly for our own good, sometimes mainly for that of others; and so I prefer to rest content in the assurance that, if a passive one, I am still indubitably an instrument for some purpose.'

And in this belief Mr. Strangeways remained as year after year joined that uneventful decade which had already elapsed.

Good fortune had, in the main, attended Garth Trendall, and he was able to do something towards carrying out some of the small schemes he and his friend used to talk over and arrange

through the long winter evenings; but far better fortune than happened to anyone else came to Jasper Polgarth. Prosperity, however, did not improve him. He became silent and morose, and at last left the village for Ortho.

It was in the summer succeeding Polgarth's departure that one day Mr. Strangeways met a young artist on the Beacon Cliff, in whose work he was very much interested. After some desultory conversation, the young man asked him if accommodation for one night could be obtained at St. Aphra, and after a little it was arranged that the artist should accompany Mr. Strangeways home.

In the course of the evening the young fellow talked much about his art, and his prospects, and his home. But, after all his light-hearted chattering, all that Mr. Strangeways could remember was the name and birth-place of his new acquaintance.

'I am a Scotchman,' the latter had said; 'I am a Scotchman, and I come from Dundee, though it's little of my life, save being born, that I've spent there. My father, Hugh

Armstrong, is a large wood merchant there.'

'Hugh Armstrong'—'Dundee.' Why did these two names keep haunting him so, wondered Mr. Strangeways; why were they more curiously familiar than 'James Macdonald'—'Edinburgh;' or any other names of persons or places that he had for many years heard mentioned, or which he had come across in books?

This incident affected him strangely for a time, but in less than a month it had become nothing more than an incident, and was ere long practically forgotten. Two years later—in the spring—a lad from Ortho came over in a gig to St. Aphra, and asked to be directed to the house of Mr. Strangeways.

'What do you want with Mr. Strangeways?' inquired the person asked.

'I be from Mr. Polgarth's, wi' word for he.'

This surprising intelligence was soon all over the village, but no one was more astonished than the recipient of the message.

The boy handed to the schoolmaster a piece

of paper sealed up into an envelope. Opening this out, Mr. Strangeways read :

‘Come, if you possibly can. I am dying, and I want to see you.

‘JASPER POLGARTH.’

A summons from a dying man was not to be disregarded, but in any case the schoolmaster of St. Aphra was not the man to refuse any reasonable request which it was in his power to grant, and where acquiescence would give pleasure.

In a few minutes he had joined the bearer of the message, and was driven rapidly along the level cliff-road towards Ortho. On the way he learned that Mr. Polgarth had not been succeeding at all, that he was broken down with sorrow at the death of his son, and at his daughter's ruin (both events news to Mr. Strangeways), and that he had lately rapidly sunk under some mysterious complaint, from which there seemed no hope of recovery. After the gig had drawn up at the door, Mr. Strangeways had to wait some time before he could see the man who had

sent for him; more than once his quick ears caught what sounded like a tone of supplication, and once he distinctly heard a voice that he knew saying,

‘I cannot see him—I cannot see him!’

But after waiting at least a quarter-of-an-hour, a man came downstairs, and, having introduced himself as Dr. Youngs, told Mr. Strangeways that he could go up and see Polgarth. When the visitor entered the dark and close little room where the dying man lay, he noticed that the latter turned aside his head at the moment he entered; so, after waiting a few moments to see if any word would come from Polgarth, he went up to the bedside, and, laying his hand gently on the latter’s shoulder, asked what it was he had wished to see him about.

Turning suddenly round, the man exclaimed, in a tone of uncontrollable eagerness,

‘You have been happy all these years, haven’t you, Mr. Strangeways?’

‘Happy? I don’t quite know what you mean?’

‘I mean, have you been happy throughout these eighteen years or more which you have

spent at St. Aphra—do you regret having had the rest and peace of this long period?’

‘I have been content,’ was the reply.

‘I have done you a cruel wrong, Mr. Strangeways—such a wrong as I do not think that even you will find it easy to forgive. I am a dying man, sir, and would fain not leave this world without attempting to confess my iniquity—and fain would I have your forgiveness also, if that were possible.’

‘What is it that I have to forgive you, Jasper Polgarth?’

‘Mr. Strangeways,’ exclaimed the man, half rising from the bed in his excitement, ‘what would you say if it were told you that all through these years I have held the clue to the mystery of your past?’

A long silence intervened, a silence terrible to the man who had just spoken. Mr. Strangeways turned away his head, and Polgarth could see by the working of the muscles in the averted face how strong was the emotion of this quiet and self-possessed man.

‘Speak,’ was at last the reply in a stern voice.

'Will you—can you forgive me, Mr. Strangeways?'

'Speak, Jasper Polgarth.'

'On that night when Garth Trendall pulled ye out of the surge at the mouth of the Slice, I was the man nearest to him, and, just as he and you were dragged ashore in good time, I caught sight of something fall from your waist, or perhaps from Trendall's grasp. While the rest of them were all stooping over you and him, I caught sight of the same object hurled in on the next wave, and in a moment I gave a grab at it and secured it. I don't know what made me act as I did, beyond saying that the devil tempted me. I swear I had no thought of evil at the moment. But after that awful night, when I found my smack destroyed, and my house half blown in, and when I had got my wife and children put safely elsewhere, I returned to my place, and then I opened the leather belt which I had snatched from the surge. In the right pouch I found a thick row of notes, and in the left nothing but a letter. I took a sudden horror of the thing, but already the poison had

entered into me. Before I left that night, I buried the belt and the letter in a secure place, and at once went off to Ortho with the notes. You know the rest. All the money which I took from that belt—and it was a large sum—a larger sum than any fisherman of St. Aphra ever had—was spent long ago, and, alas, even now I can do nothing to replace it, for, as you've heard, doubtless, I'm a ruined man.'

'I care nothing for the money you took from me, Jasper Polgarth; but you have robbed me of nigh upon twenty years of my life, and God knows what suffering you may have caused to others as well as to myself. Man, did it never in all these years strike you to repair the cruel wrong you have done. Where is that letter—what does it say?'

'It is here, Mr. Strangeways, here below this very pillow; but I have one last request to make to you. The doctor says I can't possibly live out the week, and, after all the long waiting you have had, a few more days can make little difference to you. Will you wait till after I am dead before you open this letter?'

Jasper Polgarth saw Mr. Strangeways as no one in St. Aphra had ever seen him in all these long years. A look of mingled fury, scorn, and fear swept over his face, absolutely bloodless as the latter was.

'How dare you ask such a thing of me? Do you think that because I have been silent all these years I have not suffered bitterly, knowing what evil things might be happening on account of my absence. Do you think, man, that if a prisoner who had been kept twenty years in a cell were told that the last day of his sentence had come round at last, he would take it easily if the governor informed him that, after having been in prison for twenty years, a few more days of confinement couldn't matter to him? No, Jasper Polgarth, I feel now that a day, nay, that even an hour, must not be lost. Give me that letter.'

'Forgive me, forgive me!' cried the man, in an agony of contrition; 'I will not give it to you until you forgive me.'

Then, for the first and last time in his life, Mr. Strangeways committed a cowardly action.

Stooping, he thrust his hand below the pillow on which lay the dying and vainly-resisting man, heedless of the latter's vain prayers and clutching fingers. The next moment he withdrew a small packet, his eye at once catching the address upon it, which was to him by his present name, at his house in St. Aphra.

‘Whose writing is this?’ he exclaimed, abruptly.

‘That is mine, Mr. Strangeways; give me back that letter, or I will brand you as a thief. Do you hear me?’

Then, as the wretched man saw that his visitor was about to hurry from the room, he screamed out,

‘Forgive me, forgive me—I am dying.’

Mr. Strangeways hesitated a moment ere he stooped to pass through the low doorway. Once again came the cry of the dying man, this time with that gurgling sob in its sound, which is always so horribly significant.

‘Come back, come back! forgive me, as you hope to be forgiven.’ Then, with one last despairing effort—‘Come back, *Hew Armitage!*’

As an osprey swoops from a rock, so Mr. Strangeways sprang to the side of Jasper Polgarth.

'What do you say—what do you say?' he cried, wildly. 'What voice out of the past is that which I heard? Speak, man, speak—what name was that by which you called me?'

A shiver passed through the limbs of Polgarth, and three or four bead-like drops suddenly stood upon his forehead, but he made no answer.

Jasper Polgarth was dead—the one man who knew anything of his past. For a moment Mr. Strangeways forgot all about the letter, and thought only of the man lying there stiff and quiet before him.

Suddenly he looked around, as if seeing or expecting to see some one beside him.

'I forgive you, Jasper Polgarth.'

The words had a hollow sound as they echoed through that silent chamber of death. No mortal ears heard them save those of Mr. Strangeways himself, but none the less, perhaps, the words came with a blessed relief to him for whom they had been spoken.

As in a dream, Mr. Strangeways turned and left the room, telling the boy he found in the shop below that his master was dead, and that he had better go and tell Dr. Youngs.

The gig in which he had been driven over from St. Aphra had been taken away by the boy who had brought it, but it was doubtful if Mr. Strangeways even noted its absence. He strode rapidly through the ill-paved streets of the little town, across the high-arched stone bridge, and then struck across the cliffs on the white level road that led towards St. Aphra. His brain was in a whirl—his life-blood seemed to be surging through it and his heart with an energy that overwhelmed all other thought or emotion.

It was one of those glorious days in the youth of the year, when even the flowers seem to give forth in their fragrance some faint, far-away suggestion of music. The trailing vetch which ran among the clover and over the small lichened boulders, held a constant subdued hum where the young bees lingered. Above the

sprouting grasses rose tall moon-daisies, their yellow discs gleaming almost as blithely as the golden sheen of the kingcups. The first spring-gold of the gorse came out among its thorny branches, and in dozens of places across the heathy summit of the cliff came that sweetest of cries, the familiar tone of the yellow-hammer. But to-day he took no notice of the deep, blue, unclouded sky or the great stretch of windless sea; heard neither voice of yellow-hammer nor lark, nor sea-mew's wail; noticed neither tall marguerite nor dewy violet in the short, crisp grass of the cliff summit. In his ears there was a sound like thunder, a name that was reiterated again and again with what was to him overwhelming persistency. If unconsciously he heard the natural sounds around him, they but shaped themselves into repetitions of this same word. The faint inland wind breathed it; the subdued beat of the sea on the sands far below murmured it; even the sea-mews, as they passed overhead, seemed to wail it forth.

'Hew Armitage — Hew Armitage — Hew

Armitage!' only these two words—nothing more—yet Mr. Strangeways knew that no longer was the past to be a sealed mystery to him. He knew that these words had been the key which had unlocked a door through which he was now bound to pass.

But as the wildly though vaguely excited man reached that part of the seaward path the Beacon Cliff which led almost by the very edge of the heights, and as he saw the calm blue sea sleeping far below his feet, he started back with a cry, almost as if he had escaped a death which would not have been wholly involuntary.

Throwing himself down on the short sweet grass along the top of the cliff, he buried his face in his arms, his whole frame racked with deep sobs. As in a dream all the past was becoming a memory—not yet, indeed, a reality, but a memory of sufficient sorrow and bitterness to cause the strong man to give way. As some spirit who, while on earth, had undergone extremity of suffering, might at some unexpected moment in its new life awaken to recollection of

all that it had gone through before its release from the flesh, so was it with Hew Armitage. He saw dimly the tragedy, the long agony of his terrible past, and, because he knew it to be his own past, the tears, the sobs of revived sorrow came from him with new bitterness. But not yet did he realise that the white-haired schoolmaster of St. Aphra and the Hew Armitage of the past were one and the same; not yet did he comprehend that after his long forgetfulness he had awakened to the old life once more.

At last he sat up again, and, withdrawing the letter from his pocket, opened the envelope.

It was the letter, dated twenty years back, that Dr. Steele had written to Hew Armitage in Australia, telling him of the death of his wife, and of the sad uselessness of his long and trying voyage, stating also the writer's belief that the child was alive, though as yet he had been unable to find any clue to its whereabouts.

This part of the letter came upon the reader with a sudden shock; he had forgotten all

about the little daughter that had been born to Mona and himself, and now he realised that possibly the child might be living even at that moment, though, of course, no longer a child.

Strangely enough, he now dwelt more on the latest and less poignant experiences of his past life. He remembered having sailed from Melbourne in the *Macedon*, of having had a long and wearisome homeward voyage, during which he had sunk into a deep and apparently hopeless depression, and the beginning of the last catastrophe; and, finally, he recollected that, without any special desire to live, yet with a natural instinct, he had stripped himself ere the ship was dashed to pieces, and had fastened round his waist a belt containing the often-read letter from Dr. Steele and a large sum of money in notes.

Before Mr. Strangeways rose and walked homeward from the Beacon Cliff he had left that later personality behind him for ever. The old energy of his nature had returned, and he was once more and henceforth, whether he willed it so or not, Hew Armitage.

Curious eyes were cast at him as he walked rapidly past several of the cottages in the direction of the Trendalls', for already a rumour had got bruited about that some strange news had come to the schoolmaster, and that he was like one moonstruck in consequence.

An hour or so later Garth Trendall came forth, and told a few eager listeners that something had brought back Mr. Strangeways' memory, and that he had, after long deliberation, decided on leaving them.

'He told me to tell you, lads, that if these many years that have gone by have brought too many changes for him to be of any use in his own sphere of life, he will return to St. Aphra and be Mr. Strangeways once more. But if he finds that duty and inclination prompt him to remain in his native parts, and among his own kindred, then he will still come back again, but only for a visit, and to say farewell. I am to tell you nothing of his strange and sad story till after I have heard from him from Scotland.'

'From Scotland!' one or two muttered, as if

the speaker had referred to America or India.

‘If all is well with him, I will let you know what he has confided to me ; otherwise, he wishes his secret to remain a secret. But I may tell you—what, indeed, we all guessed must be the case—that he is a gentleman of rank. We know nothing about rank—but everyone in St. Aphra knows that he is a true gentleman, such an one as we have never seen before, and are not likely to see again.’

Early next morning Hew Armitage—and already his late name seemed unfamiliar to him—left St. Aphra, before noon reached Truro, and in due time arrived in London. Garth Trendall, at his friend’s special request, accompanied him, for not only was Mr. Strangeways (as for a short while longer he intended to call himself) frail, but he was weak with excitement ; and, moreover, it would be all the better for him to have a witness.

It seemed to him a long time before one bright spring morning he reached Dundee. He had been too much pre-occupied with his

past to heed the strangeness of his new circumstances, even his one night in London having stirred him little ; but to Garth Trendall everything was wonderful and full of intensest interest. From the journey from Truro to London (he had never been in a railway carriage before) to the arrival in the northern town, he was in one continuous dreamlike state of amazement. The noise and griminess of London, as he saw it, simply appalled him, but the country and the glimpses afforded of towns and villages, delighted him greatly.

After having some breakfast, Mr. Strangeways and his companion went at once to the office of the lawyers who long ago had transacted all his business for him.

‘Yes,’ he was told, ‘Mr. Hannay is in, and is disengaged. What name shall I say?’

‘Mr. Strangeways.’

When the latter entered the well-remembered sanctum, he looked eagerly at the occupant, but to his disappointment saw a middle-aged man with unfamiliar features.

‘Are you—are you—Mr. Hannay?’

‘I am, sir. Perhaps you are confusing me with one of my partners, Mr. Murray or Mr. Johnstone?’

A sudden thought occurred to the visitor.

‘Excuse me, but you are not Mr. Douglas Hannay?’

‘No, sir, that is my father’s name. But he has practically retired from the firm, and only comes into Dundee now and again. Are you a friend of his?’

‘I knew him well long ago, and now wish to see him on a matter of great importance.’

‘Well, it so happens that he is in Mr. Murray’s room at present, and I will—ah! here is the very man himself. This gentleman, Mr. Strangeways, wants to speak with you, sir?’

The two men looked at each other for some moments, after the mutual bow, without speaking.

‘Have you wholly forgotten me?’ at last said the stranger, sadly, in a low voice.

Mr. Hannay looked keenly at him, then shook his head doubtfully, muttering the while

‘Strangeways—Strangeways—no, I never knew the name.’

‘It is not my name that you are trying to recall. You once knew my real one well. But look again before I tell you who I am.’

A minute passed, when suddenly a startled light came into old Mr. Hannay’s eyes.

‘What—good heavens!—no, it cannot be! It is impossible, wholly impossible. You are not—you dare not say that you are Hew Armitage?’

‘I am Hew Armitage.’

‘Hew Armitage! Hew Armitage who was drowned close upon twenty years ago? If not drowned, and indeed Hew Armitage, why, in Heaven’s name, this late revealment of yourself?’

‘I will tell you all my sad story in good time, and I have much to learn from *you*. But you do indeed recognise me, Douglas Hannay?’

‘I do, I do, my poor friend! Good heavens, how you have changed! You look an older man than I do, though I must be twenty years your senior.’

‘Hannay, Hannay, my daughter, is she——’

‘You have turned up in the nick of time, Hew Armitage.’

CHAPTER III.

THE TURNING OF THE TIDE.

ABOUT a week after Mr. Farquhar's declaration of war, and Lora's scornful acceptance thereof, the latter got a telegram which sent a glad light into her violet-blue eyes, at the same time that a flush lit up her fair face.

The telegram had arrived at the breakfast hour, and naturally attracted universal attention.

Sir John looked up anxiously, for every day he expected to hear of some hurtful step taken by Lora's guardian; but he smiled as he saw her blush and the quick look she cast around the table.

‘Why, Lora, my dear, that must be from a certain foolish young man? He must have had a wonderfully quick passage.’

‘It is from Liverpool, dear Sir John, and he says——’

‘Who says—who says?’ was the laughing chorus from young and old.

‘And he says he will be here this evening! Oh! I’m so glad! I didn’t expect him here for another week yet!’

All day Lora went about in a dream—an exquisite, happy dream—for was not her lover coming home well and strong and eager to see her again? When a ring came to the door-bell late that afternoon, Lora at once jumped up from the sofa where she was sitting by the side of Lady Ramsay, crying, ‘That’s Edward at last!’

‘Why, how do you know, you foolish child?’ exclaimed the latter; but Lora was right all the same, and a moment or two later was in her lover’s arms.

What happy moments there were thereafter; with what shy grace she clung to the man whom she so loved, and yet whom she in a sense knew so slightly; how he held her at arm’s length again and again, glad beyond measure to see

once more the girl he loved, and at the same time to note how lovelier than ever she had grown.

During dinner there was a host of things to talk about, but, as the new arrival noticed, mostly connected with himself or with mutual acquaintances, and with little or no reference to Lora or the Ramsays themselves.

After dinner the two lovers went into the studio, from where Sir John laughingly declared he was being shamefully ousted.

‘You of course heard, Edward, dear,’ said Lora, ‘of the death of my poor old granny, Mrs. M‘Ian?’

‘Yes, of course I did, my darling; you wrote to me yourself about it, Lora, and told me how it was arranged you were to accompany the Ramsays home here, adding the important postscript that Mrs. M‘Ian had left behind her a communication for you, which you were to read as soon as you came of age. If you have written me anything of importance since then, I have never received the letter.’

‘Then I will tell you all that has happened since,’ said Lora.

It was nearly an hour before her narration came to an end; not that the account of all that had transpired down to Mr. Farquhar's declaration of war would in itself have occupied anything like this time, but because of the frequent interludes that one of the twain found to be absolutely necessary, and which both seemed to relish extremely.

Edward Duncan was furiously indignant at what he heard concerning Mr. Farquhar's behaviour, but the measure of his wrath was strongly qualified by the extreme interest he naturally felt in Lora's change of circumstances.

'I am certain,' he said, 'there's something queer about that guardian of yours. Why should he be so very desirous of preventing your marriage with one he has never seen, and of whom he knows nothing? Why, it almost looks like as if he wanted to marry you himself.'

'Perhaps that was his reason, Edward,' remarked Lora, shyly.

'What do you mean, Lora? You are not in earnest, surely?'

'Yes, dear, I am; and, if you ask Sir John

about what Mr. Farquhar said concerning you, and as to how he behaved towards me on a certain evening in this house, I think you will understand what good cause I have for disliking my guardian on personal grounds alone. But I do hope, Ned, that you won't do anything foolish on the spur of the moment, for I am quite certain that with a man like my guardian it is better to await the course of events than to attempt anything against him.'

'That depends on circumstances, Lora. I can assure you that, if I find he has been lying to you about me, or that he has forgotten himself towards you in a shameful way, then I shall consider myself justified in paying a special visit to this remarkably loyal and generous friend of your father's. And now let us talk of ourselves.'

This they did so effectually that the next hour or two slipped by almost unnoticed; and, when Lady Ramsay looked in to say good-night, Lora laughingly declared that she did not wish to see Mr. Duncan for another month, as she had told him everything she had to say.

After his sweetheart had left him, Duncan was joined by Sir John, and immediately after they had lit their cigars, the young man asked his companion as to what Mr. Farquhar had said to Lora concerning him, and as to how he had behaved to Lora.

Sir John told him about the story which Mr. Farquhar had trumped up—a story, added Sir John, bearing its own refutation on the face of it.

‘As to how Lora was insulted by him, I only know that she practically forbade him the house in consequence of something he had said or done, exactly *what* Lora never told either Lady Ramsay or myself.’

Despite Edward Duncan’s happiness at once more being beside the girl he loved, he felt he could not rest until he had seen this Mr. Farquhar. With considerable difficulty, he found out, first, the lawyers who were the latter’s agents, and then from them his latest town address. To the latter he went at once, but found the handsome rooms in Torphichen Street tenanted only by an old woman, who told him that Mr. Farquhar was staying in the country at present.

‘Where is the place in which he is staying?’

‘It’s called Firnie Knowe, sir, and is somewhere in the neighbourhood o’ Dundee.’

Determined to put off no time, Edward sent off a telegram to Grant Square stating that he would not be there till late in the evening, and possibly not till the next morning. Thereafter, he went straight to Princes Street station, but found he had an hour to wait before the departure of the afternoon train to Dundee.

It was after sundown when he reached the latter town. Accordingly, it was dark by the time he had reached the small station of Firnie by a local train from Dundee. Having received the necessary directions as to the way to Firnie Knowe, he struck up the long avenue-like road, which led through tangled hedgerows towards the main-road to Dunluiart. The evening was still and exceptionally mild, but not yet did that most summery of sounds fill the air—the harsh cry of the corncrake, though here and there swooped the blurred figure of a night-jar or rapidly-twisting bat. A light was shining in the lodge at the end of the long south avenue, but Duncan took no notice thereof, and ere long

reached the lawn in front of the old house itself.

Just as he was about to go up to the porch and ring the bell, he caught sight of a gleam of moving light across the smooth sward which curved round the house, between it and the gardens. By an unaccountable impulse, he stole softly round the house till he reached a large ilex that grew midway on the lawn in front of the north side of the house—that on which were situated the library and ante-room of the drawing-room. The gleam of light which he had seen came from the former, and he could just descry a figure moving about therein. Seeing that no blind obscured the window, he determined to approach closer.

When he drew close to the broad French window, he crouched amid the fragrant lilac boughs that fell in a thick screen half way across the lower part of the window. From his position he easily saw the greater part of the room, though at first the occupant was hidden from sight, as he was at the inner end of it, where was the fireplace. Within the next few moments, however, the man whom he

had seen from the ilex passed rapidly to and fro. From the description he had received from Lora, he knew at once that this was Mr. Farquhar, though he was surprised to note how handsome, and even refined-looking, the man seemed, and also how considerably younger than his presumed age.

What was he about, wondered his watcher, as Mr. Farquhar stooped every here and there apparently putting away certain objects in secret places. Once he stooped, and, touching a spring in an old-fashioned cabinet, pulled open a drawer, which he wrenched back, and then, with a chisel, forced open the door of the *escritoire*. He apparently already knew the contents, for he seemed only desirous to find out if there were no secret drawers anywhere. At least half-an-hour was spent by Mr. Farquhar in carefully examining the measurements of everything inside the *escritoire*; but at last he seemed convinced that nothing had escaped him. Duncan saw him smile to himself with a peculiar look, which, having once seen, the former felt he should never forget.

What was this that Mr. Farquhar kept putting

so methodically inside the *escritoire*—apparently acting for the same purpose as he had done with other parts of the room? What *could* it mean? wondered the young man; for he saw that Mr. Farquhar was unmistakably carrying out some definite plan, and that, moreover, he was calculating every single thing he did.

All at once a terrible suspicion flashed over his mind; he hardly dared to believe that this man would take such a devilish revenge.

At that moment a rake, which a gardener had left leaning against the lilac-bush, fell with a crash on the gravelled pathway. Duncan saw Mr. Farquhar start back like one changed into stone; the next moment he had sprung towards the window, and Edward was just in time to spring into his leafy shelter when the window was thrown back with a crash, and Mr. Farquhar called out, in an authoritative tone,

‘Who is there?’

From where he crouched Edward could see that Lora’s guardian grasped in his right hand a revolver, and it must be confessed the young man felt exceedingly uncomfortable, owing to

the fact that the weapon pointed directly towards himself, and might at any moment go off; but at the same time he realised he would have still less chance for his life if Mr. Farquhar discovered him.

Suddenly he noticed that the latter's gaze became intent, and again he heard him cry out,

‘Stop there, I see you.’ No answer. Edward thought he heard a faint rustling sound beyond the ilex from which he had lately crept, and the same moment he saw Mr. Farquhar raise his right arm in readiness to fire.

Again no answer, but a dark shadow as of a stooping man moved swiftly across the upper part of the lawn.

Crack! a crash following thereafter; and then a sharp, sudden cry, and the person at whom Mr. Farquhar had fired made no longer a moving shadow across the dimly moonlit sward.

Springing hastily from the window-ledge the latter ran in the direction whence the cry had come, and for a minute or two he was lost to Duncan's view owing to the darkly-spreading boughs of the great ilex. Ere long Mr. Far-

quhar returned, walking slowly, and lingering awhile on the lawn, as though expecting to see one or other of the gardeners hastening to find out the cause of the shot. But either the latter had been unheard, or no attention was going to be taken of it, for no one approached. As Mr. Farquhar crossed the gravel path he stooped and lifted the fallen rake, thrusting it savagely into the heart of the great lilac bush beside him. It struck something soft, but with swift presence of mind Duncan made some slight motion sufficient to enable the handle to pass from his side underneath his arm, and so further in among the branches.

‘Curse the thing, it gave me a fright,’ muttered Mr. Farquhar, as he stepped across the window-ledge. ‘Well, I will need to look alive, or I’ll waste half the night in setting about this business.’

He closed the window after him, and with great deliberation fastened up the shutters, so that no longer any gleam of light betrayed what was going on inside. Duncan realised that there was no use of his staying there any

longer, and also that it would never do for him to be too late in having his interview with Lora's guardian—and he certainly had no desire to pass the night in the same house with that gentleman.

At the same time he felt that he must exercise extreme caution in leaving his present shelter. For all he knew, Mr. Farquhar might still be suspicious, and might be secretly watching the lawn from some point where he could see anyone that might attempt to cross it. Then, again, he felt that he could not in common charity leave the place without finding out the fate of the unfortunate person whose death-cry still rang in his ears. At last, with extreme caution, he crept out from amidst the fragrant lilac boughs, and stole rapidly in the direction of the ilex, once safely beneath whose shade he turned and took a careful scrutiny of the house. No gleam of light was observable anywhere, though he fancied that once or twice a momentary pinpoint of light shone through some chink in the shutters of the long room, to the right of that

in which he had seen Mr. Farquhar. Feeling so far reassured, he ran swiftly in the direction whence he had heard the cry, and this time he thought he had betrayed himself indeed. For, just as he had crossed the upper end of the lawn, where it was deeply overshadowed by an avenue of limes and chestnuts, he tripped over a still warm body, and fell heavily against some slim pole bearing red earthenware pots, placed there for insects. They fell to the ground with what seemed to Duncan a terribly loud crash, and, as he lay half stunned to the ground, he every moment expected to hear Mr. Farquhar running towards him with his loaded revolver.

No sound came, however, either from the house or from the body over which he tripped; so, after intently listening for a few minutes, he rose and looked about him. Edward Duncan was no coward, but he was unarmed, and he felt assured that such a man as he was certain Mr. Farquhar would not hesitate to use his weapon against him without the least compunction. Just then his eye

caught sight of the dark mass lying a few feet away from him, and he saw at once that it could not be a man.

‘Perhaps it’s some poor lad,’ he muttered, but the next moment he saw that Mr. Farquhar’s deadly aim had only brought down a prowling fox.

With a feeling of relief he left the unfortunate animal, and walked rapidly, but as silently as he could, round to the front of the house, where he rang the bell with a loud clang. The door was answered in due time by a fine-looking old woman of an unmistakably east-country type. Duncan knew that this must be Mrs. Fyfe, but did not address her by her name, only stating that he wanted to see Mr. Farquhar on business.

‘What name, sir, shall I say?’

‘Oh, he doesn’t know me; say simply that I am a gentleman who wants to see him on a matter of business.’

In a few minutes Mrs. Fyfe returned, saying that her master was in the smoking-room, and would be glad to see the visitor there. As

Duncan entered the room he instinctively noted that Mr. Farquhar had so placed himself as to keep a table between himself and his unexpected guest.

‘To what do I owe the honour of a visit at this late hour?’ inquired Lora’s guardian.

‘You owe it, Mr. Farquhar, to certain remarks of your own concerning me. My name is Edward Duncan.’

Mr. Farquhar started, but almost simultaneously he regained his self-control, though a strange, sombre light came into his eyes, and a peculiar, flickering smile wreathed about his thin lips.

His visitor also noticed that he put his right hand negligently on the edge of the billiard-table, just above one of the chalk-rests, where, Edward felt assured, lay in readiness the weapon which had already been used that night..

‘Ah, Edward Duncan? Let me see, you’re the young man who had the audacity to engage yourself to Miss Lora Armitage.’

At this sneer Duncan flushed angrily.

‘What do you mean by audacity? Let me

tell you, Mr. Farquhar, that I have come here to demand an explanation of previous insults, not to endure fresh ones.'

'Well, young man, tell me what you want, and be quick about it.'

'I want to know on what authority you told Miss Armitage that lying story as to my behaviour to some poor girl in Edinburgh.'

'I decline to tell you, Mr. Duncan.'

'Because you cannot, you cowardly scoundrel!'

'It might be more advisable for you, Mr. Duncan, to restrain your impulsive temper. I am not the man to permit a person of your character to speak to me thus. I have made ample inquiries about you, sir, with the result that I am determined to emphatically forbid my ward's marriage with you.'

'I fail to recognise your right to decide one way or another.'

'And I fail to see what right you have to come bothering me here. I tell you once and for all, Mr. Duncan, that I will not and cannot consent to your further engagement to my ward; and,

further than this, I beg you to understand that I am undesirous of having any further communication with you at all.'

'I won't detain you long, Mr. Farquhar, but I simply want to say that an explanation I must and will have as to your story concerning myself.'

'This I am quite willing to do when I return to town, because there I shall be able to produce the unfortunate girl in question.'

The young artist seemed quite taken aback at the barefaced audacity.

'You are the most consummate liar I have ever met with,' he said at last. 'Then, as to the way in which you behaved towards Miss Armitage—if you were not a much older man, and nominally Lora's guardian—I should give you the thrashing you deserve.'

A scornful smile flitted across Mr. Farquhar's face, but he took no further notice of the remark.

'But one thing at any rate I can do, and that is to absolutely forbid you to hold any further oral communication with Miss Armitage except in my presence.'

‘My dear sir, you are talking like the foolish boy you are. I think you should really go home now, for your company is not entertaining to me, and it is not good for young men like you to be out late.’

Mr. Farquhar’s sneering insolence roused Duncan’s quick temper to fever heat.

‘You’ll speak to another tune before long, Mr. Farquhar. I tell you to your face that I do not believe that document you brought home with you is genuine—in other words, that it is a forgery, and that you are the forger.’

Again Mr. Farquhar smiled, but seemed in no wise put out. Putting his hand forward to the chalk-rest below the billiard-table, he lifted up a revolver.

‘Do you see this, my good friend? You do? Well, I shall expedite your departure with it if you do not at once take yourself off.’

‘Just exactly what I should expect a man like you to do. A coward has no other resource but that of unequal force. However, I have said my say. Understand me unmistakably, that if I find you again speaking to Miss Armitage, except in the presence of myself or some friend

of her own, I shall horsewhip you in the street; and I also give you notice that I shall express freely my opinion that you are a swindler and a scoundrel; and, if you like, you can take legal proceedings against me. I don't think *that*, however, is very likely—the fox doesn't go and put its head into the trap of its own accord, as much as to say, "Snap me, if you please." And now I have the honour of wishing you good-evening.'

Edward left the room abruptly, but as he entered the long hall he met Mrs. Fyfe again, and at once asked her if she had any message for Miss Lora Armitage.

'Are you a friend of hers, sir?' asked the old woman, eagerly.

'Yes, I am. You may have heard her speak of me. My name is Edward Duncan.'

'Ah, yes, I remember; you are a fortunate young man. One moment, sir; are you a friend of Mr. Farquhar?'

'To be a friend of mine, a man must be a gentleman,' replied the young man, sententially.

‘You mean you don’t like him?’ asked the practical housekeeper. Then, lowering her voice, she said, quickly, ‘I have indeed a message to send, sir. I’ve tried hard to get away from here to see her, but Mr. Farquhar has always prevented me, and, though I’ve written a letter with a most important message to her, I’ve never heard in reply, and fear my letter’s been tampered with.’

‘Your epistolary misfortunes are doubtless very afflicting,’ said a low mocking voice behind Mrs. Fyfe, and, looking round, the latter saw to her consternation that Mr. Farquhar had passed into the library from the billiard-room, by the inner door, and that he had come out of the former unseen, owing to the great hall pillar that stood between them.

‘I am certain, my dear Mrs. Fyfe,’ he went on, in the same mocking tone, ‘that it cannot be good for you to stand talking here in this draught. *I* will see this young man out—a troublesome young person, whom I beg you to remember is not again to be admitted.’

‘Have you any message, Mrs. Fyfe?’ asked

Duncan, taking no notice of the last speaker.

The housekeeper hesitated a moment, but before she could reply Mr. Farquhar thundered out, angrily,

‘Why don’t you go, woman, when you are told?’

A moment later Duncan found himself in the dark avenue again, indignantly conscious that the door had almost been slammed against him as he turned to go out. Fuming with rage, he strode rapidly along under the black shadows of the elms and chestnuts of the avenue, and soon found himself in the by-road that led towards Firnie Station. Arrived at the latter, he found to his consternation that the station was locked up, and it was some time before he found out that a short way down the line was a signal-box. Going up the narrow, rickety stairs, he nearly frightened the life out of the signal-man, who, hearing a slight noise behind him, looked round and saw a white face looking in at the small window in the door. From this man he learned that the night mail had gone, and that, though several trains passed through

Firnie during the small hours of the morning, none stopped thereat till the express, which passed about five o'clock. He also learned that there was no inn in the neighbourhood, and that even at Firnie village, distant some three or four miles, it would be almost impossible for him to get accommodation.

‘You had much better go back to Firnie Knowe, sir, and put up there for the night.’

‘I’ll need to, so good-night, and many thanks.’

As Duncan walked back by the way he had come, he had no intention of entering Firnie Knowe again, but thought he would either put up at the gardener’s lodge, or, if this failed, in one of the outhouses. When he reached the lodge he came to the conclusion that it would be wiser for him not to get the gardener into any trouble on his account, so he determined to skirt the gardens, and gain either stables or some other of the outhouses. He was no longer the delicate young man he had been a few months before, and could risk a night’s discomfort of this kind without the probability of having to suffer for it. Passing along a brier hedge

which skirted the upper ends of the gardens, he came to several outhouses, the doors of which were all unlocked, and in one of which he found a number of sacks lying on the floor. Throwing himself on these, he lay for some time in that quiescent state of mind and body which is almost sleep. But just as he was dropping off into unconsciousness an annoying restlessness perturbed him. He could not sleep, strive as he might, and the more he endeavoured to compose himself the more and more restless he became. At last there came upon him that intolerable sense of something painful or dreadful being about to happen. Still he felt too fatigued to rise and shake off the unpleasant oppression, and it was not until a strange pungent odour affected his nostrils that he rose to his feet and looked out.

What extraordinary shadows there were flickering to and fro across the sloping lawn! Why, it must be some of the gardeners coming home with lanterns, all, probably, a little the worse of drink. A few steps forward convinced him of the real state of affairs. A broad tongue

of deep crimson flame spurted intermittently amidst curling wreaths of smoke issuing from the lower part of the house.

‘Good heavens!’ he exclaimed, ‘the house is on fire;’ and, forgetting everything in his excitement, he ran towards the courtyard which lay to the right, and where he instinctively knew he would soonest be able to attract attention. But already the outbreak had been noticed, owing, as was afterwards ascertained, to a fit of sleeplessness which had prevented Mrs. Fyfe from taking her night’s rest, so that she was fortunately able to discover the smell of burning before the flames had made great way. She had at once given the alarm, and the gardeners and stablemen had hurried into the courtyard, and were there laying on the hose-pipes that were always kept in readiness. Mr. Farquhar had been hurriedly awakened, and he seemed to sleep with strange pertinacity, despite the continuous knocking at his door, and he had now joined the men in the yard in their endeavours to prevent the fire spreading.

As Duncan approached he heard Mr. Far-

quhar calling out to the men not to mind the burning wing of the house, but rather to prevent it spreading to the other quarters.

‘Oh, it’s only in the billiard-room as yet, sir, and I think we’ll manage to get out all the books and pictures from the library before the flames get at them. Come along, men, and let’s do what we can.’

‘Stop a bit,’ cried Mr. Farquhar; ‘the house is of more importance than the books;’ then, seeing that his hearers instinctively knew this was not the case, and were about to do their best to save what they could, he turned round angrily, and at the same moment caught sight of a figure amongst the laurels to the left of the courtyard. A fresh gleam of fire flashed in this direction at the same moment, and by it he recognised the features of Edward Duncan.

A flash of triumphant malice lit up his eyes as he realised how fate had played into his hands.

‘Maxwell, Macfarlane, look here! Do you see that fellow lurking about there? Don’t let him escape. It is he who set fire to Firnie Knowe.’

And before Duncan could make any resistance, or, indeed, realise what had occurred, he found himself grasped by four strong hands and dragged into the courtyard.

‘You infernal villain,’ said Mr. Farquhar, ‘we have caught you red-handed in the act, and you’ll pay for this night’s work. Did you want to burn every soul within this house, that you chose the dead of night for your cowardly devilry?’

Duncan was too confused and amazed to make any reply, and only stared blankly at his accuser.

‘Fasten him up with these ropes, men, and then throw him into the coal-cellar there. He can spend the rest of the night with the rats, and on thinking over the fate that is in store for him.’

‘It’s a lie,’ shouted out the young man, suddenly; ‘it’s a lie, I tell you. This man has set the house on fire himself. I can prove it.’

‘Come, that old game won’t do. All here know that you were lurking about these grounds this evening, and that at last you gained admittance, only, however, to be shortly turned out again. That was in the early part of the even-

ing, and how can you explain your being still in the grounds of Firmie Knowe at this hour past midnight? No, no, my good fellow, you'll have to answer for what you've done. And now, men, chuck him into the coal-house and attend to the fire.'

The next moment Edward Duncan found himself in total darkness, and half-suffocated by the thick dust that covered him where he lay among the coals.

Greatly to the delight of all concerned—of all save one—the fire was got under with marvellous success, and by two o'clock there was not even any smouldering left. Comparatively little damage had been done, and that not to the really valuable contents of the rooms. Once more quietness settled down upon the house, and even Mrs. Fyfe managed to fall asleep. But in his room Mr. Farquhar paced to and fro, muttering angrily every now and again,

'Curse that old pole-cat of a housekeeper! Why on this night, of all nights, should she be awake? If it had not been for her sniffing about like some old rat, the whole northern

wing would have been in flames by this time. Now I have had all the trouble and all the risk for nothing, and won't be able to realise anything after all from the insurance companies. If I had only known,' he added, savagely, 'that she would be likely to come between me and my purpose, I should have taken care to have set fire to the part where her bed-room was first, and, if possible, have burned the old hag in her bed. And now what am I to do with this precious youngster? I hope he enjoys his night's rest among these coals. I wish that she-devil of his could see him now. Let me see; it won't do, of course, for me to have him really handed over to justice.'

For a good hour Mr. Farquhar continued walking about his room, pondering over this and other matters of difficulty. At last he lifted a time-table from a book-shelf, and looked to see at what hour the early morning express stopped at Firnie.

'Five o'clock,' he muttered, 'and it's now about four. H'm; I'll be just in good time to do it.'

Blowing out the light in his room, he stole gently downstairs and into the smoke-blackened breakfast-room. Noiselessly he removed the bolts of the shutters, and, unfastening the French window, stepped out on to the soaked sward by the side of the house.

A few moments later he was in the courtyard, and had opened the door of the coal-cellar. Stooping, he uncut the rope that tied Duncan's feet and hands, asking, as he did so, the recumbent man to follow him. Stiff and half-dazed with rage and indignation, Duncan did as he was told. Even as he followed his guide in a transport of fierce emotion, he could not help admiring the cool assurance or indifference which Mr. Farquhar manifested towards him, evidently quite heedless as to whether the young man should take any opportunity of revenge or not. When they reached the upper end of the south avenue, Mr. Farquhar abruptly faced round.

‘Now look here, my young friend, I’m acting thus not out of any compassion to you, but wholly on account of my ward, Miss Lora Armi-

tage. Between ourselves, seeing there are no witnesses at hand, I presume you won't deny that it was indeed you who set fire to Firmie Knowe?

'I do emphatically deny it, Edwin Farquhar, and, what is more, I accuse you of the act yourself.'

'On what grounds, pray?'

'Because I was watching you for some time before I gained admission to the house. The noise that distracted you in the library was made by the falling of a rake from the lilac bush in which I was hidden, and not by the unfortunate fox which you so skilfully shot.'

A sudden gleam came into his hearer's eyes, and his hands made a furtive movement towards his waist, but almost instantaneously he checked his impulse, whatever it was, and looked steadily at the young man before him.

'Well?' he asked, inquiringly.

'And while hidden in the lilac bush I distinctly saw you put a variety of things in different parts of the room—things I now know to have been so placed to facilitate the burning of the room.'

Mr. Farquhar laughed outright.

‘Why, you fool, I was engaged in unpacking a number of books and magazines which I had brought down from Edinburgh, with a number of miscellaneous ornaments which I had purchased to make the very bare smoking-room here a little more attractive. It was while putting these in different parts of the room that I heard a noise out-side, and immediately concluded that it was some poacher or illegal intruder, and so determined to give him a fright.’

Mr. Farquhar’s manner was so entirely natural that Duncan felt quite taken aback. Perhaps, after all, he had been mistaken, and was doing a gross injustice to Lora’s guardian. If so, what more natural than that the latter should suppose that he, Edward Duncan, was indeed the perpetrator of the shameful act.

Accordingly, when Mr. Farquhar resumed speaking, Duncan did not attempt the indignantly scornful answer which he had just been on the point of uttering.

‘In addition, I may say that a prosecution of you would entail at present very considerable inconvenience to me, so altogether I am in-

clined to let you go scot-free, in the meantime at any rate. But I warn you that if you cross my path again I'll have you up for attempted arson, and you may rest assured that, with such convincing proofs against you, you will find it uncommonly difficult to prove your innocence—if, indeed, you are innocent, which, personally, I decline to believe. You're in good time to catch the five o'clock train from Firnie. So I would advise you to be off.' And so saying Mr. Farquhar turned and strode back towards the house.

That morning, a few hours later, Mr. Farquhar came down into the yard, and explained to the gardeners that he had permitted their prisoner to escape.

'As a matter of fact,' he added, 'I came to the conclusion, after carefully questioning him, that he was innocent of having caused the fire, whatever other intentions he may have had. Anyway, I gave him the benefit of the doubt. And it is quite possible that the fire arose from some natural cause. I wish nothing more said about it, so please understand that the subject is not to be mentioned to anybody whomsoever.'

CHAPTER IV.

GATHERING CLOUDS.

A FEW days subsequent to the events narrated in the last chapter, Mrs. Fyfe was walking across the fields to the south-west of Firnie Knowe, when she heard the clatter of a horse's hoofs along the main road. Looking round, she espied Mr. Farquhar, who at once reined in and called out to her,

‘A beautiful day, Mrs. Fyfe; I suppose you are out taking a stroll, but please don't be long going back, as I shall be wanting a cup of tea before long.’

The housekeeper looked put out.

‘Mary is in the house, sir, and can do all that is required in that way. I thought I would just

step over to Firnie to see some of the tradespeople there about their accounts.'

Mr. Farquhar hesitated a moment, but seemed satisfied with her answer, for he told her not to shorten her walk by any means, under these circumstances.

No sooner had he disappeared towards Firnie Knowe than Mrs. Fyfe changed her direction and walked as rapidly as she could towards the belt of woodland to the right, which skirted the estate known as the Cedars, whereat its owner, Dr. Steele was then residing.

The old doctor, as he was invariably spoken of in the neighbourhood, had been at his country house for some three or four days past, but, hitherto, Mrs. Fyfe had not been able to get across to the Cedars.

When the servant told him that the housekeeper from Firnie Knowe was desirous of seeing him, he looked surprised, but at once asked her to be shown into his room.

'How do you do, Mrs. Fyfe? Nothing wrong at the Knowe, I hope? I suppose Mr. Farquhar is staying there at present?'

‘Yes, sir, he is. I want to speak to you about something, if you please, Dr. Steele—for I know that you are the oldest friend of the family. At the same time, I may be mistaken—if so, my excuse must be that I was rendered so on account of my interest in dear Miss Lora.’

‘My dear Mrs. Fyfe, if you have been suspicious of anything—and I may tell you we are *all* suspicious of *something*—I wonder you did not write either to Miss Armitage or myself, or else come over here earlier.’

‘I *did* write some time ago, sir, but though my note to Miss Lora contained a statement that must have been startling, if not already known to her, and though I took the precaution of sending a boy with the note in case Mr. Farquhar should see it in the letter-bag and take it out, I have never heard a word in answer. I am quite sure, sir, that Miss Lora is not the kind of person to behave thus.’

‘You are quite right, Mrs. Fyfe. She could not have received your note, or else her answer has been intercepted.’

Hereupon Mrs. Fyfe narrated everything that

had occurred down to the incident of the fire, concluding with the important item of her recognition of Mr. Farquhar as some one she had known many years before under a different name. Of the fire incident she evidently thought little.

‘What an extraordinary fatality,’ exclaimed the old man, in a low voice, after he had pondered for some time over the strange news just communicated to him. ‘The ways of Providence are indeed strange. After all these years, is evil still triumphant over good? The thing is a mystery.’

‘Mrs. Fyfe,’ he added, ‘you have done Miss Armitage a great service. There are urgent reasons why some arrest of Mr. Farquhar’s powers as a guardian should be made at once, and this fact which you have just communicated to me is, at any rate, amply sufficient for this purpose, if, indeed, as I hope, it may not suffice to bring about the effacement of Mr. Farquhar altogether. The sooner the better, for that man will work her some cruel wrong, if, indeed, he has not already done so. We ought, however,

to be absolutely sure what we are doing. So tell me, please, Mrs. Fyfe, by whom was it you sent the letter you addressed to Miss Armitage ?'

'I waited till after the letter-bag had been locked and sent away, and gave the note to little Jamie Simpson, who had come to the house from the village on a message, and told him to give it to the station-master, who would attend to its being sent off all right. I've never seen Jamie since, but I think of going over to Firmie from here and questioning the lad.'

'Then you won't need to go over to Firmie to make inquiries. Last week my coachman here engaged him as a stable-boy, Lawrence having left for a better place. Just touch that bell beside you, please, and we will have him in.'

The lad was shortly afterwards ushered into the room, looking very sheepish and a little frightened.

'Now, Jamie Simpson, I want to ask you some questions. But you needn't look so frightened. There is no fear of anything if you will only speak the truth ; but if I find you *don't*, why,

I'll send you back to Firnie at once, and you know what a flogging you will get from your uncle.'

'Please, sir, it wasna me wha kill't it—an' besides, we thocht it waur a doo.'

'What are you talking about, my boy?' asked the puzzled doctor. 'Don't blubber there, but tell me what you mean.'

'Please, sir, Kenneth M'Ilwraith an' me went ower to Firnie Knowe yestreen to see if we could get some blackie's eggs, and Tam Stewart had tell't us o' a mavis's nest at the corner o' the wud; but whan we gaed doon by the burn ahint the Firnie Knowe gardens I thocht I saw a cushy doo—a pigeon, ye ken,' added the boy, seeing a puzzled look in the old man's face, 'an' I got ready my catapult to ha'e a shot at it. But Kenneth was afore me, an' wi' a bonnie pebble banged it fair i' the heid, an' it gied a squawk like I dinna ken what. Whan we lookit for it amang the brackens we saw that Kenneth had kill't ane o' Mrs. Fyfe's braw grey hens.'

'What!' interrupted the person referred to, she having heard of the incident for the first

time; 'ye kill't one o' my grey hens, did ye? Ma certie, my lad, but ye'll pay for this yet.'

'Oh, I think, Mrs. Fyfe, we'll let Jamie off this time if he tells us the truth about the letter,' interceded Dr. Steele. 'Now, Jamie, attend to what I am saying, and see you tell me the truth. Do you remember Mrs. Fyfe giving you a letter to post some time ago; it was one day when you were over to Firnie Knowe on a message?'

A guilty look came into the lad's face.

'Ay, sir, I mind it weel.'

'Did you go with it to the station, as she told you?'

'I gaed to it as fast as I could, sir.'

'I am asking you if you went to the station with the letter, as you were told?'

'Please, sir, he took it frae me, an' tell't me to be quiet aboot it, an' gaed me a bit siller to mysel'.'

'*Who* did?'

'The laird at Firnie Knowe, sir.'

'Mr. Farquhar?'

'Ay, sir.'

'Well, that will do, Jamie. I'm glad to see

you have spoken the truth ; but, the next time you are given a letter to post, I advise you to see that you do it yourself. Do you understand? Now go, and don't let me hear any more complaints about you.'

'What did you and that other willy-waukie do wi' the puir birdie?' asked Mrs. Fyfe, suddenly, ere the lad had slunk from the room.

'Please, mem, we buried it.'

'Buried it? ye rascallions! Where did ye bury it?'

'Jist beside the old birk at the side o' the burn whaur there's a tree owre it. We pit a slate owre its heid, an' I prayed for't, the way I heerd Mr. MacLagan, the meenister, pray for auld Granny Nicholls, when she waur earth'd the ither day.' Then, seeing Dr. Steel smile, and even the stern features of Mrs. Fyfe relax a little, Jamie slyly went on. 'An' then Kenneth wrote wi' his slate-pencil words like you see on thae tombie-stanes in the kirkyard.'

'What did he write, Jamie?' asked the old doctor, much amused.

'I dinna ken noo.'

‘Hoots, ye ken well eneuch,’ exclaimed Mrs. Fyfe, indignantly, and relapsing into her broadest accent. ‘It’s something gey impudent, if I’m no far wrong.’

‘Ye’d be waxy, if I tell’t ye.’

Something touched the old woman’s sense of humour, and she laughed slightly, as she told him she would let him off this time, if he told them what the epitaph had been.

‘Here lies a hen, a’ feathers an’ legs;
Auld Fyfe will swallow nae mair o’ its eggs,’

repeated the lad, with a sly twinkle in his eyes.

‘Awa’ wi’ ye, ye brat, afore I skelp your lugs,’ cried the housekeeper, trying to look angry.

As the boy left the room, a servant entered bearing a note for Dr. Steele marked immediate.

It was from Sir John Ramsay, and requested him to come to town at once, as he had an important communication to make in connection with Lora’s guardian, and wished his friend’s advice.

‘I must go into Edinburgh this afternoon, Mrs. Fyfe, and about the very person we have

been discussing. So your visit to me has been most opportune.'

Mrs. Fyfe said good-bye, and managed to get back to Firnie Knowe without meeting Mr. Farquhar, and, though she was questioned by him later on, she managed to avoid making him suspicious.

In due time Dr. Steel reached Edinburgh, and, when he arrived at Grant Square, found Sir John awaiting him in the studio.

'I am very glad you have come, doctor, for I want your advice. Something has turned up that will enable us to checkmate Mr. Farquhar, but I want your advice as to how to catch our eel. He is so slippery that, if we act too precipitately, he will probably score another point in the daring game I am convinced he is playing.'

'I, too, have brought you strange news, and I can scarcely doubt that between us we will weave a net which will snare this hawk, wary, though he be. But tell me what it is that has occurred.'

'Well, it seems that Edward Duncan was so enraged at what he heard concerning some

story that Mr. Farquhar had trumped up concerning him, and which that gentleman had repeated to Lora, and also about that amiable individual's behaviour here one night, when we were all out save the dear girl herself, that he went down to Firnie Knowe in order to have an interview with Mr. Farquhar.' And Sir John thereupon related Mr. Duncan's exciting adventures at Firnie as the reader already knows them. 'Well, to come to my information,' continued Sir John, 'it so happens that an old college friend of Edward is the junior partner in the firm of writers employed by Mr. Farquhar. This gentleman, a Mr. Gemmell, met Duncan the day after the latter's return from Firnie Knowe, and after listening to Duncan's outspoken statements concerning his opinion of Mr. Farquhar, requested him to accompany him into a quiet restaurant close at hand. There Mr. Gemmell confided to Edward a most important secret. "I don't say what course I would have pursued under ordinary circumstances," he said, "but, as an old friend of yours, and your prospective best man at the wedding, which I hope is

not to be now long deferred, I feel it is my bounden duty to help you in your crusade against Mr. Farquhar, though he *is* a client of ours. However, I'll pacify my partners, if they cut up rough—as, however, I don't expect they will—by saying that we will have you instead. Well, I was reading over that will of Hew Armitage lately. Without any definite intention—perhaps to get the light to bear on what looked like an erasure, but which was only a pen-scratch—I caught sight of the water-mark of the paper. In a moment something of suspicious significance flashed through my brain. The paper *was* very new-looking, once I thought of it. Well, this water-mark, as it is called, was one characterising the paper of a recent manufacturer; it showed a lion rampant in a wavy shield, and around the latter the words 'Eglinton & Co.' I know Mr. Eglinton slightly, and had no difficulty in seeing him when I called at the works, as I had lost no time in doing. He told me (1) that there was no one else of his name in the trade, and that there was no similar water-mark in use save in

his own manufactory; (2) that the Eglinton works had only been started within the last eight months; and (3) that the document I showed him belonged to a 'lot' that had been given out some six months ago, and no more of which had been made since. Finally, I asked him if it were possible that the document before him could by any possibility have been signed in Australia in March of last year. He looked at the water-mark and the paper again before speaking, and then declared it to be impossible. So now," went on Mr. Gemmell, "you have a trump card to play in the game you have begun with Mr. Farquhar." As soon as Edward learned this important news he came up here and talked it over with Lora and myself. We were undecided as to what step next to take, so thought we would take you into council.'

'In a word, then, Sir John, it is certain that this precious document, giving Mr. Farquhar so many powers, could not have been written in Australia until some months after Hew Armitage's death, if then; that it must have been written here; and that in consequence the whole thing is a fraud.'

‘Exactly.’

‘Then I think we have settled Mr. Edwin Farquhar at last, or that we are on the high road to do so. What do you think of the following news, with the new and troublesome complication it entails?’ and Dr. Steele informed his companion as to what he had heard from Mrs. Fyfe.

Both now realised that, for Lora’s sake, they must proceed with extreme caution. After dinner Sir John asked her and Edward Duncan to join Dr. Steele and himself in the studio in order to discuss the matter fully. Ultimately Lora, under the altered circumstances involved in Dr. Steele’s communication, expressed her wish that Mr. Farquhar should not be arrested save on his absolute denial of the charges to be brought against him, and on his refusal to give up his trusteeship, and that he should be allowed to leave the country if he would undertake never to return.

‘A ridiculous arrangement,’ said Dr. Steele, irritably, ‘and of what possible value is the promise of such a man as Farquhar? But at

least you are prepared to let the law take its course if he should show fight ?’

‘Certainly. For the reason you know, I should deeply regret to see Mr. Farquhar sentenced to penal servitude ; but it would be culpable folly to let this sentiment be carried too far.’

CHAPTER V.

A STRANGE MEETING.

MR. HANNAY had scarcely finished his emphatic statement when Mr. Strangeways—or, as he must now be called, Hew Armitage—swayed heavily as if he had lost his balance, and fell forward. The great excitement under which he had been labouring ever since the death of Polgarth, and his knowledge of his own identity, accentuated by the fatigue of his rapid journey north, had proved too great a strain for him to endure. With great concern the old lawyer and his son laid him on a stiff, horsehair sofa, and at once sent for a doctor. It was with much relief they heard the latter's verdict—that there was nothing seriously wrong, and

that the patient had a much stronger constitution than his appearance would lead one to imagine. He recommended, however, that as soon as the gentleman recovered he should be driven home and put to bed for a few hours, after which he would probably be all right. Leaving a prescription for an opiate, the doctor left, and his carriage had not driven away before Hew Armitage regained consciousness. He felt very weak, however, and with a strange passivity asked no further questions, but allowed himself, accompanied by Trendall, to be driven to the hotel at which he had previously engaged rooms. Before he left the office, he made an appointment with Mr. Hannay to meet him at his club at eight o'clock the same evening, promising to send word for the latter to come to him if he should feel too unwell.

At the 'Midlothian' Hew Armitage found Mr. Hannay awaiting him. Trendall said he would wait outside and enjoy a smoke and a walk along lamplit Princes Street at the same time, but that he would not stroll any distance

away, so as to be within reach the moment he was wanted.

Mr. Armitage, looking an old and worn man, gave his companion an outline of his story, and concluded by asking if his listener thought there would be any difficulty in the matter of his assumption of his rights, considering the long period that had elapsed since his supposed death, and taking into account the strangeness of his story and the great change in his appearance.

‘Not the least, my dear friend, not the least. Even if I for one did not recognise you—and I am sure Dr. Steele also will recog——’

‘Ah, my dear old friend is still alive then? Thank God for that.’

‘Oh, yes, he is still alive, and, moreover, remarkably hale. He also, as I was about to say, is sure to recognise you. Then, of course, the fact of your having been washed ashore with that belt, and Steele’s letter to you in it, is sufficient evidence in itself, or would be to most men. And now I must tell you all I know, though I can only give you a broad

outline. If Dr. Steele were only in town, I would take you to him at once. By-the-by, he may be. I'll just send up a messenger to Grant Square to find out, and, if the doctor should by good chance be in town, we will go to him without delay.'

Mr. Hannay could tell his eager listener little or nothing about Lora till the discovery of her position as the latter's daughter; but yet every crumb of information was welcome to the starved love of the man who had years ago loved so well, and who had undergone such extremity of suffering.

While Mr. Hannay was supplementing his information with all he knew concerning the Ramsays, Mr. Maxwell Armitage, and others, the messenger returned with the announcement that Dr. Steele was at home, and would be glad to see Mr. Douglas Hannay and the friend referred to in the message sent by the latter.

Garth Trendall was found waiting at the door, and the three got into a cab and were driven to the house of Dr. Charles Steele, with whom the old man always lived when he was in town.

They were shown into a small room, where a fire was burning brightly, and where only two candles gave a vague illumination. The two gentlemen and Trendall were barely seated ere the door opened and the tall, bent figure of Dr. Steele entered.

‘How do you do, Mr. Hannay! it’s some time since I’ve had the pleasure of seeing you. Curiously enough, I was going to look you up to-morrow about an extraordinary business in connection with a matter I once spoke to you about before.’

‘The Armitage matter?’ asked Mr. Hannay, with a peculiar smile.

‘Yes. But, pray, introduce me to your friends.’

‘My friend here is known by a somewhat uncommon name—Mr. Strangeways.’

‘Glad to make your acquaintance, Mr. Strangeways; pray be seated.’

‘And this is Mr. Garth Trendall, of St. Aphra, in Cornwall.’

Dr. Steele suitably replied, but beginning to look surprised, wondering, as he did, what could

be the drift of this visit from the lawyer and these two strangers.

‘I have come,’ said the former, ‘to throw a little light on the strange disappearance of your old friend, Mr. Armitage, and to bring to your notice—or, rather, my friend here will do so—certain facts that will have an important bearing on Mr. Farquhar’s claims.’

‘Indeed,’ cried the old doctor, eagerly, thinking how rapidly now the coils were encircling the man he had mistrusted and disliked from the first; ‘then I can assure you that Mr. Strangeways’ information will be most serviceable, and it could never be more so than at the present moment.’

If the room had not been so insufficiently illuminated, and if he had not left his eye-glasses in the room from which he had just come, Dr. Steele might have noticed two large tears roll down the face of Mr. Hannay’s white-haired friend. To the latter, the voice of his old friend was like a strain of sweet and once familiar music, heard after many years of suffering and sorrow, and in a strange place and amidst

strange faces and alien interests. It was only with a great effort that he could steady his voice sufficiently not to betray the tremor that vibrated within it, like an aerial current in the heart of a great leafy beech-tree on a windless day.

‘I am the schoolmaster, or rather have been for close upon twenty years past, at the little fishing village of St. Aphra, on the Cornish seaboard, a few miles from the old port of Ortho. My companion here is the leading man in the place, and I might say the richest, if any idea of riches could be associated with St. Aphra.

‘Many years ago a terrible storm wrought incalculable damage along the southern coast of England, and naturally Cornwall suffered most. Conger Cove, as the small bay outside St. Aphra is called, witnessed only one wreck that night, but it was one so absolute that literally no trace of the vessel was afterwards found. A few spars and tangled ropes, serrated by the fang-like reefs known as the Conger’s Teeth, were washed ashore, but nothing that could give the fishermen any clue as to the

name or nationality of the unfortunate vessel. But by the strenuous efforts of some of the fishermen, and mainly through the heroism of Mr. Trendall here, one man was rescued from the surge that had whirled him, bruised, but not severely, into their reach. Not another soul was saved out of all on board the—the—that ship.'

'What was its name?' interrupted Dr. Steele, with sudden eagerness.

Mr. Strangeways, however, took no notice of the question, but resumed his narrative in the same low tone, his deeply-lined face being almost invisible in the heavy shadow which overlay it.

'I will not detain you with particulars of all that happened thereafter, but will content myself with a broad outline.'

Hereafter, the old man narrated in clear yet faltering accents the events of his life at St. Aphra. Coming to the part played by Polgarth, he said—

'On his deathbed this man Polgarth made a strange confession. On the night of the wreck

he had seen a belt fall from the waist of the castaway, or, perhaps, from the clutch of Trendall; this he had secured and secreted. In the solitude of his ruined cottage, ruined by the wind on that terrible night, he opened the two pouches of the belt, and found in one of them a thick roll of notes, and in the other—a letter. This letter would have afforded the schoolmaster the clue to his past, but for all these long years the man Polgarth had basely kept the letter a secret, not even writing (as he might easily have done without being detected), to the person who had written the letter, with the information that the addressee had been wrecked and was now at St. Aphra, but with total loss of memory owing to some shock. Before the schoolmaster left the room, the man Jasper Polgarth was dead, and the all-important letter was in its real owner's hands. But already the dying man had called him by his true name, and almost in a moment there was a dreadful lightening of the deep darkness that had for so long shrouded his bygone years. It was not till he was out upon the lonely cliffs that the school-

master opened that fateful letter, and then once more he lived anew through an old and bitter agony.'

A great sob broke the stillness that followed the sudden cessation of Mr. Strangeways' voice. It came from the schoolmaster himself.

Dr. Steele trembled with excessive agitation. Twice he lifted up his hand as if to assist him in saying something, but each time it only shook aimlessly, like an aspen leaf quivering in a furtive breath of air,

'To whom was the letter addressed?' at last he said, in a thick husky voice.

'It's outer cover was inscribed with the name of the schoolmaster—Mr. Strangeways.'

'To you?'

'Yes. Can you imagine what the name on the inner envelope was, John Steele?'

For all answer the old man rose, tears still further blinding his eyes, and, placing his hands on the speaker's shoulders, gazed into his face.

'It cannot be, it cannot be,' at last he cried; 'it cannot be that the dead thus came to life.

My friend, my friend, whom I loved and long so deeply mourned, it is not you who have now come back, old and white-haired like myself? Speak, Hew Armitage, and tell me that I do not indeed see once more the friend whom I loved in bygone years!’

‘I am even that Hew Armitage upon whom the hand of God lay so heavily.’

‘I felt it, I felt it, when you were midway with your story, but I fought against it, not believing the thing possible. Your face has changed, and your manner is not that of Hew Armitage whom I knew, but the voice is almost the same as of yore, though it is weary where that was strong and hopeful.’

Tears fell slowly from the eyes of both men as they stood hand in hand by the fire, neither of them able or desirous of speaking further words just then.

Mr. Hannay made a sign to Trendall, and then, whispering to Dr. Steele that they would be back in a quarter-of-an-hour or so, the old lawyer and the Cornish fisherman went out of the room.

When they returned they found the two friends of old days sitting hand in hand, the younger man looking more like a brother of the aged doctor than a comparatively youthful friend.

‘I know all, Hannay,’ said Hew Armitage—
‘all that you were unable to tell me. I have much yet to learn, but in the meantime I thank God I have come into my old life in good time to protect my daughter from wrong. As for that villain whom you know as Mr. Farquhar, the day of his evil prosperity is set at last.’

CHAPTER VI.

A MYSTERIOUS ROBBERY.

IT was late before Hew Armitage and Garth Trendall took their leave of Dr. Steele. Mr. Hannay had left after a long consultation with the united friends as to which would be the best steps to bring Mr. Farquhar into the net.

It had been arranged that next day Dr. Steele should break the news to Lora, and that her father should be brought to her as soon thereafter as practicable.

Mr. Armitage heard from his friend where the Ramsays resided, and, when the hall door had closed behind him and his companion, he could not resist the temptation to walk round to the opposite side and to stand a few minutes in front of the house itself. A church clock had

struck the half-hour after midnight just as they were leaving Dr. Steele's house, and Trendall put Mr. Armitage in mind that the hotel might be closed if they returned too late.

'No, no,' the latter had answered; 'no fear of that; and I feel sure that I *must* go and look at the house. You do not know what it is, my friend, to starve for love.'

The light of a street lamp irradiated dimly the doorway of the Ramsays' house. For what seemed to Trendall a long time they stood there. Hew Armitage was living over a portion of the long-buried past, and was deep in reverie. At times he looked at the upper windows of the house, wondering if in one of these front rooms slept Lora, and at these moments a yearning look came into his eyes, a perfect, though passive, agony of longing. Bitter, indeed, had been his portion. A happy youth, indeed, and the promise of a happier manhood; then treachery, sorrow, tragedy, grief unutterable, and a long, strange silence that was not rest.

Two or three times he had turned away, and had reached the end of that side of the garden

pavement, but after each occasion he returned, as if drawn back to the same spot by some irresistible magnetic influence.

It was during the return from one of these ineffectual departures that Hew Armitage saw the hall-door of the Ramsays' house slowly open, and two figures come forth. He was surprised, for there had been no lights observable, and he had naturally concluded that all the inmates were asleep.

The two men closed the door gently, probably so as not to disturb those who were in their beds, and then swiftly crossed the road, and were at once lost in the deep shadow.

'Friends of some of the young Ramsays, most likely,' thought Hew Armitage, 'let out quietly thus so as not to disturb the others.'

'Perhaps they have seen Lora,' was his next thought, and he looked jealously into the darkness as if he would fain have discerned and spoken to one of these fortunate young men.

The next moment he heard rapid footsteps, and almost simultaneously two shadowy figures loomed close upon him. Trendall was in the

deeper shadow, but he at the moment was close to a lamp, whose wan, whitish-yellow light shone full on his face.

The two new-comers halted as soon as they descried the figure by the lamp-post, but a second glance seemed to reassure them. They were almost touching Mr. Armitage when one of them sprang back with an oath, grew so deadly pale that in the gaslight his face seemed as ghastly as that of a corpse, and staggered back as though dazed with sudden horror.

‘Can the dead indeed return?’ came hoarsely from his quivering lips. Then, as if the sound of his own words reassured him in some measure, he turned and fled with utmost speed, leaving his companion in a half-frightened and wholly-puzzled condition.

The latter looked disdainfully at the white-haired man beside the lamp-post, muttering, ‘What the devil does my friend Charlie mean? —is he out of his mind to hook it from this old beggar here?’

Though the man who had fled could distinctly see the face of Hew Armitage, the latter had

not been able to perceive clearly that of the former. He at once, however, realised that there was something suspicious about these two men, and the sudden start and flight of one of them. If he had heard the latter's exclamation, it might have afforded him matter for speculation.

So, as soon as the remaining midnight visitor of the Ramsays had walked swiftly on, Armitage turned to Trendall, and told him in a low voice to follow the man that had just passed him.

‘Be cautious,’ he added, ‘not to lose sight of him, and at the same time not to let him see that he is followed. Note well the address of the house where he enters, and then return at once to our hotel, and I will leave word with the porter accordingly.’

Despite the many things that had occurred to distract his attention from his work, Sir John Ramsay found it imperative on the morning following the meeting of Dr. Steele and Hew Armitage to put the finishing touches to a large painting that had that week to be sent in to the Royal Scottish Academy.

Immediately after breakfast, he went into his studio and commenced his work. The picture represented Marie Antoinette. With a sigh of impatience, he rose and went to the safe where, among other valuables, were deposited Lora's jewellery. He gave a start as he saw that the key was in the lock.

‘How foolish of me to leave that key there, with so many valuable things inside. I remember now! I put away some of these things just before dinner, and I have not been in the studio since.’

Pulling back the heavy iron door, he opened the drawer in which Lora's things were kept, and stared in dumb astonishment as he beheld nothing inside. The next moment the thought struck him that of course Lora had herself taken them out. And yet, what could be the meaning of this? although he had not secured the safe the night before, he remembered now that he had locked the studio door, and put the key in his pocket; and that, moreover, when he had come hither a few minutes ago, he had found the door unlocked. It was only now that he remembered what had occurred the night

previous, and putting his hand in his pocket, he found the key still there. This incident made him feel very uncomfortable, for he knew that there was no duplicate key of this room. Lighting a candle, he stooped at the door and examined the lock; beyond all doubt the bolt had been forced back and the lock broken. He went at once to the morning-room, where he found his wife and daughter and Lora still chatting together; but, in reply to his anxious questioning, he learned that all three were absolutely ignorant of the loss or misappropriation of the jewels. After much consultation with each other, it was decided to see the servants separately.

Sir John explained candidly what had happened, adding that, of course, their good sense would convince them that everyone in the house must be willing to allow every investigation to be made by the detective for whom he was about to send.

‘It is not that I have suspicions of any one of you, but because it is absolutely necessary that this matter must be cleared up.’

In the course of the forenoon a detective

officer solved the first part of the mystery. He seemed to find out by instinct various subtle traces which had escaped the eyes of those in the house. After he had finished his investigations, and traced the burglars in all their operations, he turned to Sir John and said,

‘Before I go to make inquiries of a different kind, can you, Sir John, give me the faintest clue, or have you the vaguest suspicion of anyone?’

‘No, I cannot at all conceive who it could be. My own impression is that it is a case of ordinary burglary.’

‘Nonsense, Sir John, if you will excuse my saying so. Would ordinary burglars pass over the silver plate that was lying in the pantry and in the dining-room? or, indeed, would they content themselves with taking nothing else than Miss Armitage’s jewellery? And again, how do you account for their having come straight to the safe here without any apparent hesitation?’

‘You are right, I see; but still I cannot assist you. It so happens that there have been absolutely no strangers visiting this house of late, save Mr. Edward Duncan, Miss Armitage’s be-

trothed, and Mr. Edwin Farquhar, her guardian.'

'And both these gentlemen, I suppose, are wholly beyond suspicion?' asked the detective, sharply.

'My friend Duncan is wholly so; as for Mr. Farquhar, I can only say that, while I have every reason to mistrust and dislike him, I have none to imagine him connected with this robbery.'

'What is Mr. Farquhar's address?'

Sir John gave the detective the information he wanted, and had just bidden him good-bye, when Edward Duncan entered the studio with Lora.

'Everything is arranged,' he cried. 'Word has been sent from Lora to Mr. Farquhar that she would like to see him here this afternoon. Mrs. Fyfe will be here in good time; and Dr. Steele has arranged about the warrant, and also about a detective for purposes of arrest. The doctor, moreover, gave me a hint that there were more charges than one against Mr. Farquhar, and that it was impossible he could give them the slip; and he added, mysteriously, that there would be some strange revelations made before this day came to an end.'

CHAPTER VII.

MR. FARQUHAR HAS A VISITOR, AND RETURNS THE VISIT.

WHILE the members of the Ramsay household were perturbed by the mysterious robbery that had occurred during the foregoing night, Mr. Edwin Farquhar sat gloomily in his rooms in Torphichen Street, before a small fire that flickered with dying feebleness. On the table lay his breakfast, cold, but all untasted. One or two letters lay upon the tray, and one he held in his hand as it hung over his knee.

For a long time he sat thus—a frown settling more and more fixedly on his handsome but worn and vicious face. They were not pleasant thoughts that he experienced, nor pleasant fancies that he saw imaged in the smouldering fire.

Occasionally he would give an impatient kick to a refractory coal in front of him, or look round with a half-wearied, half-startled, and wholly irritable expression. At last he raised again the hand that held the letter, and perused it for the fourth or fifth time.

‘Everything is gone wrong, confound it. This cursed insurance company are undoubtedly suspicious, and I can see there will be nothing to be gained in that quarter. The money on that mortgage is not yet paid, and I don’t make out when the fool is to hand the cash over to me. Let me see : I must have some six hundred in hand, and to-day I am to get two hundred from old Swain—that’s right. Then at Duckworth’s, in London, I have a clear thousand. A bird in the hand’s worth two in the bush, and I think the sooner I clear out the better. I’ll try the States this time—that is, New York. ’Frisco, I expect, remembers me too affectionately yet to suit my modest and retiring disposition. Murdoch had better go across to-night, if he has not gone already, as I hope he has ; and then he can join me in

London. No, by-the-by, I will join him, and cross the herring-pond by that Hamburg line. Once more—a thousand in London, six hundred in hand (in English “fives”), and two hundred due to-day, or to-morrow at latest—that’s eighteen hundred ; and at the very least I expect these stones will bring in say twelve hundred ; altogether not less than three thousand if I don’t share Schreiner’s money with Murdoch. Curse it all ! I feel quite shaky even now with that thing I saw last night. It could not have been he I saw. Strange, though, that it should have occurred just opposite her house, and on last night of all nights. What a fool I was to bolt like that ! What if I were recognised by anyone ; it would look suspicious my running away from Grant Square like a madman. I was completely taken aback, that’s the truth of the matter, and behaved more like a schoolboy than a man who has gone through all I have.’

At this moment a knock sounded at the door. Mr. Farquhar started so abruptly that it was manifest his nerves had not yet come under his absolute control, and was it instinctively

that he put his hand to the pocket of his grey morning-coat, and that a faint click followed the action?

‘Come in,’ he called out, at last.

‘A gentleman wants to see ye, sir,’ said his landlady. ‘Mr. Macdonald, he says his name is.’

‘That’s all right; show him up—and, look here, Mrs. Balfour, don’t let anyone else come in this morning. If anyone calls say that Mr. Farquhar is not at home.’

The landlady replied accordingly, and then ushered in Mr. Macdonald.

A man about forty-five, thick-set, and fairly tall, with a countenance strongly marked by dissipation, and with an expression of mingled cunning and brutality, and yet, strangely enough, not wholly devoid of certain faint traces of good breeding, was this visitor to Mr. Farquhar.

‘Good-morning, Macdonald,’ was the latter’s exclamation, when the landlady opened the door for his friend.

No sooner had she disappeared, however, than his cordiality passed away.

‘Still here, Murdoch? I thought you would have got away by this morning’s mail for the south?’

‘I thought I would rather go by the boat; there’s one sails from Leith direct to Amsterdam this afternoon.’

‘Have you the jewels with you?’

‘No, I left them in my room, securely locked in my bag, and before I left I also locked the door of the room itself.’

‘Well, I will accompany you to Murray Street, as there are some more arrangements I want to make concerning our meeting in London.’

As soon as they got into the street they jumped into a cab, and by Mr. Farquhar’s orders were driven to Nicholson Square, in the old part of the town. Here they dismounted and walked slowly through various by-streets till they reached Murray Street, in which Murdoch had a room.

When once they were safely inside, the subject of Murdoch’s visit to Amsterdam was resumed.

‘This is how the thing is to go, I understand,’ said the latter. ‘As soon as I get to Amsterdam I will go to Schreiner and see what business I can negotiate with him—taking care that I do not pass the load for less than twelve hundred, which you say is the lowest amount that the things can possibly be worth. I will get the money in gold and English notes, and the latter I will change twice or thrice at Hamburg. There I will wait till I hear from you at Schlomka’s, saying whether I am to join you in London, or if you will come out to Hamburg. Can’t you decide now what you will do? It would save all chance of misunderstanding, and, moreover, I must confess, I have no desire to cross the Channel unnecessarily.’

‘I can’t say for certain, but I’m inclined to think that I’ll join you at Hamburg; though when once we’ve divided the proceeds of the swag I think it would be wiser for us not both to go together in the same vessel—for I suppose you, too, intend to cross to the States.’

‘I should rather think so. London or New

York for me, I say, and none of your blasted foreign holes.'

'How fortunate London and New York are to meet with your appreciation,' said Mr. Farquhar, with a provoking sneer.

'I don't understand what's the matter with you—you seem bent on irritating me. What would you say if I were to do that little business with Schreiner, and then give you the slip altogether?'

'I would never have occasion to say anything, for I would shoot you like a dog the first time I met you; and that that soon or late would inevitably happen, you know as well as I.'

'It seems to me bad policy this snarling at each other,' said Murdoch, sullenly.

'And now,' replied Mr. Farquhar, taking no notice of his companion's last remark, 'let's see those jewels; I want to estimate their value now that I have leisure to examine them.'

While the two men were scrutinising and calculating the value of Lora's stolen gems, a plainly dressed man, who had strolled negligently along Murray Street, in close proximity to the

two men who had alighted in a cab in Nicholson Square, went rapidly to a neighbouring police office, where he got a warrant for the arrest of one John Macdonald, *alias* James Simpson, *alias* James Murdoch.

Mr. MacGeorge was delayed a little longer than he had anticipated in getting his necessary warrant, but when he did get back to the flat in Murray Street he found that James Murdoch was going to give him the slip again, and this time beyond all chance of capture.

‘Yes, they cannot be worth less than fifteen hundred at the very least, and see, Murdoch, that you don’t let that infernal shark, Schreiner, wheedle you into accepting a smaller sum.

Murdoch, who had for some time been vaguely suspicious of something in Mr. Farquhar’s manner, noticing a strange preoccupation quite unusual in that personage, now seemed to feel quite at ease, and laughed and joked with hilarious freedom.

‘Well, it’s time for me to go,’ said Mr. Farquhar, ‘so let’s have a parting glass together for luck: I see you have a bottle of sherry there.’

‘By all means,’ said his companion, ‘but you’ll have to put up with tumblers instead of glasses.’

Having poured out some wine, Murdoch went to a cupboard to get out some biscuits.

With a rapidly stealthy movement Mr. Farquhar’s arm moved across the table, and if Murdoch had looked round he might have seen a small, dark bottle in the hollow of his companion’s hand. From this bottle four or five drops hastily fell, and the next moment it was lying in Mr. Farquhar’s vest pocket again.

The latter gentleman all at once seemed to lose his taciturnity, and became quite friendly and even genial.

‘My dear Murdoch,’ he said, ‘I’m afraid you’ve found me rather sulky this morning, but I have been so infernally worried of late, and so upset by last night’s encounter with some old fellow whom I mistook for the ghost of a man I had once known, that I have really not been myself. We will have a good time of it in New York. And now I’ll drink good luck to you;’ and Mr. Farquhar stretched forward his hand to take the tumbler nearest him.

‘Hark! what is that?’ cried Murdoch, as a crash was heard at the bottom of the stairs; then, as a long, childish wail succeeded, he added, ‘Oh, only some kid fallen downstairs.’

Mr. Farquhar’s motion had been arrested by the startling sound, and before he had time to interpose Murdoch handed to him the tumbler next to himself—that is, the tumbler into which the drops from that black bottle had fallen—and the next moment he lifted up the other glass and drank the contents off at a draught.

‘Here’s luck,’ he cried. ‘But why don’t you drink yours?’

Despite all his self-control, a strange ashiness came into Mr. Farquhar’s lips.

‘I—I never touch sherry—I take nothing but brandy, worse luck to it all the same.’

‘Why, my good fellow, of course that’s brandy; I thought you knew it all the time. Do you think I am such a fool as to drink such mawkish stuff as sherry in this solitary hole? Come, drink it off, or I’ll think you’re not in earnest about wishing me good luck.’

Still Mr. Farquhar hesitated, his being one of

those natures that have absolute control in all circumstances that have been foreseen, but that are apt to be completely taken aback by some unexpected turn of affairs.

Something in his hesitancy, perhaps in the strange, furtive look he cast about him—like an animal suddenly cowed—caused a sudden flash of suspicion to come into Murdoch's mind. Moral coward as the latter was, he was no physical one when once brought to bay. Drawing a little closer to Mr. Farquhar, he looked at him steadily, and then spoke once more.

‘Drink that brandy, my friend, or I'll think you've been playing me false.’

‘Certainly,’ said Mr. Farquhar, with that subtle evil smile of his flitting across his ghastly pale face.

As he spoke he raised the tumbler to his lips. As swiftly as it had come, so died away the suspicion in Murdoch's mind, and he had just involuntarily given a sigh of relief when the tumbler full of brandy was shot straight into his face, burning his eyes as with the agony of liquid flame. He gave a hoarse cry and staggered

back—smarting with pain, and for the time wholly blinded.

There was a moment's absolute silence. Then instinct told the unhappy man, as he blindly groped towards the door, that his companion was about to murder him.

A prolonged scream of despair rang through the house. The next moment Mr. Farquhar sprang upon the man, helplessly staggering to and fro—forced him backward against a sofa, and, holding him down, drove the thick-bladed knife in his hand up to the hilt in Murdoch's side. A second and a third time he plunged the weapon in.

Mr. Farquhar stooped forward and methodically cleaned the large bowie knife on the murdered man's coat. Then, swiftly gathering together the jewels that were lying on the table, he was just about to leave the room. He started back at a sudden violent shaking of the door.

'Open the door,' cried a woman's voice, hysterically.—'Open the door,' came imperatively that of a man, 'or I smash it in.'

Mr. Farquhar glided noiselessly across to

the window on his right. It looked into the street, and escape by it was impossible. Two steps brought him to the window at the other end of the room. Close to this there was the flat roof of a small adjoining house, beyond which again was another house covered with scaffolding. Even at this critical moment Mr. Farquhar's keen eyes noticed that the scaffolding was deserted, owing to the men not having yet resumed work after their midday meal.

Opening the window, he slipped over the ledge, leaning thereon with his arms until he had pulled down the window again. Holding in his breath and closing his eyes, he dropped the few feet between him and the roof below, alighting there without losing his balance. At this moment a deep curse broke from him. He had forgotten the jewels after all. Now, however, it was too late to repair his folly. Hastily running along the flat roof, he sprang between the chimneys at the end of it and gained the adjoining scaffolding, issuing from the basement thereof unmolested, if not actually unseen.

He had not left the roof of the house on to

which he had dropped before the door of Murdoch's room was driven in. Mr. MacGeorge found that his warrant would be of little use. Both he and the landlady who accompanied him knew that another person had been in the room—had they not heard that horrid scream ring through the house—a scream that none save a man in dire extremity would give. A glance, however, sufficed to show that the room was empty. The detective went to the windows and at one of them he saw on the floor beside it the very jewels which Sir John Ramsay had described to him, they having fallen from their case when thrown hurriedly down by Mr. Farquhar. There was no sign, however, of Murdoch's accomplice and presumable murderer.

‘Is the poor fellow quite dead, sir?’ exclaimed the horrified landlady.

Just as she spoke, Murdoch opened his eyes, still blinded by the burning brandy, and muttered, hoarsely—‘He—Farquhar—Charles Ca—murdered—jewels——’ repeating thereaftersome vague, incoherent sounds.

The detective lifted him forward, to give him greater ease, but Murdoch was already dead.

CHAPTER VIII.

‘CAN THE DEAD LIVE?’

FROM noon onwards on that day succeeding his visit to Dr. Steele, Hew Armitage felt in a fever of excitement. He found himself incessantly mentally picturing his daughter Lora—now an exact resemblance to Mona, again with such modifications as the descriptions Dr. Steele and Mr. Hannay had suggested. But at last the tardy time drew near for him to call on Dr. Steele and to go round with him to Grant Square.

Meanwhile there were other anxious hearts in the Ramsay household. All concerned felt that some crisis was approaching, but none could guess what might be the outcome thereof.

The first-floor of the house was mainly occu-

pied by the large drawing-room, but at the side of this, and between it and the stairs, was a small ante-room, generally shrouded from view by heavy velvet curtains. As the hour of appointment with Mr. Farquhar drew near, Sir John Ramsay, Lora, and Edward Duncan sat in the drawing-room itself, and in the ante-room waited Mrs. Fyfe. The detective, for whose appearance Dr. Steele had arranged, had not yet arrived. Lora felt very uneasy, and realised for perhaps the first time that she really stood in fear of her pseudo-guardian.

The third quarter after four had struck, and still there was no sign of the expected visitor. So keen were the apprehensions each felt in a more or less degree that they found themselves conversing in lowest tones, and with those furtive, startled looks which people are wont to exchange in presence of some imminent or recent calamity.

‘Perhaps, after all,’ said Sir John, ‘Mr. Farquhar may not come. He has never answered your note, Lora.’

‘Oh, yes, Sir John, he has done so. Just

about an hour ago I received a note by post, stating simply, "I will be with you at the hour named," and as I mentioned between half-past four and five o'clock he ought to be here any moment.'

Duncan went to the window and listened intently.

Suddenly a ragged lad ran past the house shouting out the main news of his evening papers:—'Mysterious Murder in Murray Street! —Mysterious Murder!'

It is strange how some purely irrelevant word or incident will afford a sudden flood of light to the general drift of one's mind. Though no one of the three who waited there expressed his or her thought to the others, they simultaneously found their thoughts speculating as to whether Mr. Farquhar had anything to do with this. There was absolutely nothing to connect him with this proclaimed tragedy, and perhaps it was only their overwrought feelings towards that personage which led to this strange association of ideas.

The voice of the news-boy had scarcely died

away ere a sharp ring of the door-bell sounded through the house. Each looked at the other, as much as to say, ‘That is he.’

In the midst of the deep silence that ensued, Mr. Farquhar was ushered into the room. It had been so arranged that he should sit with his back to the ante-room; and without, to all appearance, taking note of his position, Lora’s guardian seated himself as directed by a wave of Sir John’s hand.

‘I came here, Sir John Ramsay, in consequence of a note received from my ward, Miss Lora Armitage, and I should have preferred to have had my interview with her alone, as I do not recognise your right to interfere in her matters at all.’

Mr. Farquhar had bowed to Sir John and his ward on entry, but had taken no notice whatever of Edward Duncan. The latter, however, answered the question just put.

‘Sir John Ramsay *has* a right to be present, and I think even you will admit that I have a perfect right also?’

‘Ah, let me see. You are the young person

I found lurking about the grounds of Firnie Knowe, and who made such a crude endeavour to set the house on fire.'

'I will not attempt to refute your insolence,' remarked Duncan, scornfully; 'and now pray let us come to discussion of the matter that has induced us to ask you hither.'

Once again there was shouted out below,

'Mysterious Murder in Murray Street!—Full Details—Mysterious Murder!'

'Have you seen the evening paper?' said Mr. Farquhar, pleasantly, to Lora. 'I don't know if you care for reading such things, but, if so, you will find a most thrilling account of what the news-boys very justly call a mysterious murder. I was quite interested in it, I assure you.'

Lora shuddered instinctively, not at the man's words, but at something in the tone of his voice and the cruel mocking look in his eyes. With some effort she addressed herself to him in the manner that had been arranged.

'Mr. Farquhar, I have asked you to come here to listen to something important that I

have to say to you. I have found out certain things about you which would legally do away with all your claims to guardianship of myself and my property, but, as I have also learned a fact concerning your real relationship to me, I am willing, much against the wish of my friends here, to give you an opportunity of redeeming the wrong you have already done.’

‘You are very kind, Miss Armitage, but I am afraid I do not follow the drift of your remarks.’

‘Miss Armitage,’ broke in her lover, ‘wishes to say in other words that you are an infernal scamp, and that the sooner you clear out the better.’

‘This is really delightfully complimentary—coming from you, Master Duncan.’

‘Mr. Farquhar,’ interrupted Sir John, ‘to save my friend, Miss Armitage, the pain of speaking more clearly, I myself will tell you in a few words our reasons for demanding that you at once withdraw all claim to your assumed guardianship, and that you at once take your departure from this country. We have learned, first, that Mrs. Fyfe, the housekeeper at Firnie,

has been interfered with in a most unjustifiable manner. Some weeks ago she wrote to Miss Armitage a letter of great importance, a letter which was never delivered, and which we now know was prevented by you from ever reaching its destination.'

'And pray how do you know this, granting that the fact is true?'

'Mrs. Fyfe was informed of the truth by the boy whom you persuaded to betray his trust, and has been puzzled by a likeness which she saw in you to some one whom she had known many years before. So strong a hold did this take upon Mrs. Fyfe that she could not rest that night of your arrival without making sure that her suspicions were correct. So she paid you a nocturnal visit, of which, I understand, you were rendered suspicious. This convinced her in her belief that you, Mr. Edwin Farquhar, are one and the same person with a certain Charles Cameron whom she had known many years previously.'

Mr. Farquhar did not seem in the slightest degree discomposed by what had been said;

indeed, he smiled slightly, as much as though he had fully anticipated this revelation.

‘Well, and what if our good friend Mrs. Fyfe did recognise in me a person of the name of Charles Cameron?’

‘Mrs. Fyfe was a servant in the house of Mr. Cameron of Dunluiart, and saw much of you and your sister Mona while you and she were at home. But before her marriage to Hew Armitage, and before the death of your father, whose heart you well-nigh broke, you had committed a forgery which laid you open to the severe punishment of the law. You know best how you escaped the penalty which was your due, but you may forget that, even after this lapse of time, you may be arrested for the sin of your youth.’

‘Granting that I were the Charles Cameron of whom you speak, I doubt extremely if you could take any steps to bring the law into action. In the first place, the original prosecutors may be dead; and, in the second, the Crown won’t take up a case of this kind without very urgent reason.’

‘If you do not think this sufficient in itself, I presume you will at any rate recognise there is sufficient reason in what Mrs. Fyfe has declared to stand in the way of your resuming any control of Miss Armitage’s affairs.’

‘I recognise nothing of the kind,’ replied Mr. Farquhar, sharply. ‘Do you think I care two straws about what a silly old woman thinks concerning me? Not only am I not Charles Cameron or anyone else save the person I represent myself to be, but I never even heard of Mr. Cameron of Dunluiart, though I fancy that I have heard my friend Hew Armitage mention the fact that his wife’s name was Mona Cameron.’

‘I am bound to tell you, Mr. Farquhar,’ resumed Sir John, ‘that we one and all flatly disbelieve the document you said you brought home from Australia to be genuine.’

‘It does not matter to me whether you believe it or disbelieve it; the fact remains the same.’

‘Wait a moment, Mr. Farquhar; we have good cause for our disbelief. We have found

out, I will not at present say how, a very important fact concerning this document—so important a fact that, in itself, it would suffice to have you brought before any criminal court in the kingdom.'

'I presume you infer that the document is a forgery,' sneered Mr. Farquhar.

'Exactly, but not merely on account of vague suspicions. As I was going to tell you, we have found that this will, if it may be so called, of the late Hew Armitage, purporting to be written in Australia in March of last year, has been inscribed on paper of a kind that has only lately been manufactured by a new company. Their water-mark is upon it—an Edinburgh firm, I may say—and they have declared it to be simply impossible that this document could have been written in Australia or anywhere else at the date named.'

Perhaps Mr. Farquhar grew a shade paler, but otherwise he remained outwardly unmoved at this startling disclosure.

Lora alone noticed the swift, furtive look he gave around him, as if scrutinising all possible

ways of escape if driven into a corner, but when he spoke his voice at once betrayed the repressed excitement under which he was labouring. Hoarsely, and with a strange, nervous tremor, he cried out,

‘It is a lie. I consider this a shameful conspiracy, but so shameful that it is bound to defeat its own ends. From first to last I deny all that you have trumped up against me, and I am prepared to do so before any witnesses and at any court of law.’

A sharp ring resounded from the door-bell, and something in its urgent summons seemed to apprise Mr. Farquhar of the necessity of bringing this interview to an end. With all his calculating faculty, he had proceeded lately like any fatalist, with eyes strangely blinded to almost inevitable eventualities. He had acted like a man who, seeing the tide gradually creeping towards the outlying rock on which he had his position, calmly closed his eyes, with the intention to bestir himself as soon as the water should approach closer—forgetful of the fact that the onward rush would every moment increase in impetus.

‘And suppose I admit,’ he asked, quietly, ‘suppose I admit that Mrs. Fyfe is right, and that I am Charles Cameron—even suppose that I do not deny having forged the will through which I assumed my guardianship over your affairs, Miss Lora, what then have you to suggest?’

‘Miss Armitage wants me to act for her in this matter,’ replied Edward Duncan. ‘What we require is this : that you make restitution of whatever you have fraudulently appropriated ; that you give an exact account of all you have done as trustee since the death of Mr. Maxwell Armitage ; that you sign a statement admitting the worthlessness of the document you produced as signed by the late Hew Armitage, and the fact of your having forged the signature at the end of it ; and, finally, that you promise to absent yourself from this country for the rest of your days, and that you will in no way molest or in any way harm the person, property, or reputation of Miss Lora Armitage, your niece and my betrothed wife. These are the terms on which that lady is mercifully willing

to enable you to escape from the fate you so richly deserve. If, however, you should be so foolish as to reject these terms, prompted only by her sensitiveness and not by her sense of justice, you will be arrested (1) as the Charles Cameron who many years ago forged bills in Dundee for a large amount; (2) as having forged a man's signature to a document whereby exceptional powers as trustee are devolved on you; and (3) for having attempted to set fire to the property of your ward; and here I may add that I am now convinced this was your intention on the night when I paid you a visit——'

'And when I had you tied up by the grooms, and thrust into the coal-cellar,' laughed Mr. Farquhar, with scornful malice. 'You should have seen your lover, my dearest Lora, in his remarkably undignified condition on that eventful night—vainly struggling, tied up like a drink-mad prisoner, and at last rendered quite sweep-like by his repose among the grimy coals. Ah, if——'

'You acted like a coward, and you speak like

a coward, and for this renewed insult you will have to answer if you should even yet be allowed to escape the justice which awaits you.’

At this moment a knock was heard at the door. Opening the latter, Sir John was told by a servant that Dr. Steele and a gentleman were in the library, and that the former wished to see Miss Lora at once on a matter of the utmost importance, adding, ‘And he told me, Sir John, that you were on no account to permit Mr. Farquhar to leave till he and Miss Lora should return.’

Lora heard the whispered words, and at once rose to obey the doctor’s message. Before leaving the room, however, she spoke once more to the man who stood watching her, a strange smile intensifying the eager expression of his face.

‘Before you, sir, lie paper and pen; if you have not written out or commenced the required statement before I return, I will withdraw any opposition I may have felt inclined to make against your committal to prison—I say “may have felt,” for, after the way in which you have

to-day spoken, I would no longer feel the least compunction in letting the law take its course.'

When Lora reached the library, she saw a tall, white-haired man standing beside the familiar figure of Dr. Steele. She glanced at him with interest, for she knew that he must be some one either directly or indirectly connected with the matter now occupying all her attention.

'Miss Lora, let me introduce to you an old friend of mine, Mr. Strangeways.'

Lora bowed, and then, seeing the stranger's outstretched hand, took it in her hand. Mr. Strangeways held it in his grasp, almost timidly at first, but, when she gently strove to disengage it, she found that, consciously or unconsciously, he tightened his hold.

'What a strange man!' she thought, as Dr. Steele's friend continued to look at her with earnest, pathetic eyes, but without uttering a single word.

'She is like—wonderfully like—as lovely, perhaps, yet I see a difference. God grant no hidden thorn lurks anywhere behind this lovely rose.'

‘Mr. Strangeways, I ought to tell you, my dear, knew well both your father and mother—far, far more intimately than ever I did; he was—he was—your mother’s chief friend.’

Lora turned again to the stranger, now doubly interesting to her. Tears dropped from his eyes, but by a great effort, evident to both spectators, he restrained further manifestations of emotion. Lora felt his hand quivering in hers, like a frightened bird hiding underneath a drooping lily; but she no longer attempted to withdraw her own.

‘Yes—I knew your mother,’ at last said Mr. Strangeways, in a low voice. How his tone thrilled Lora—she felt touched by it even more than by his worn face and the pathos of his eyes, for there was in it an infinity of longing, an echo of deathless sorrow. ‘I knew your mother; she was noble and true in all things, lovelier than any woman I have ever seen—lovelier even than you, beautiful as you are, Miss Lora. Ah, it was a cruel, a terrible thing that came between these two. My dear, may God spare you knowledge of the terrible deeps

of suffering into which the poor human soul may sink! Yes, her husband—your father—went away on a vain search; and, when all was at an end, he denied God, and strove to meet death ere death were ready; then he grew old, and waited with sad patience—with weary, weary resignation—till the great mystery of his life was laid bare. It was only when life seemed slowly shortening for him that he accidentally learned that he had a daughter living—bone of his bone, flesh of his flesh, child of his love and that of the woman who was to him all in all.’

Mr. Strangeways suddenly let go Lora’s hand and sank into a seat by the table beside him; leaning on the latter, he buried his face in his hands and burst into a passion of weeping.

‘Oh, what is it—what is it?’ cried Lora, tears falling from her eyes, and her hands supplicatingly beseeching Dr. Steele. Some new-born thought burned in her brain, like a fiery brand in a waste place. It was not articulate, but it was there, vivid, vital, about to become something terrible and all-impulsive.

Dr. Steele rose and came close to her.

‘My child, you always wear your poor father’s miniature, do you not?’

‘Yes—this is it—it always hangs here in this locket.’

‘Open the locket.’

Lora did so, looking wonderingly at Dr. Steele.

‘This is the likeness of your father as a young man; he would be many years older-looking by this time, and if he had suffered much he might even have the resemblance of an old man—be grey-haired and have deep lines on his face.’

‘Well?’ said Lora, breathlessly, ‘well?’

Dr. Steele turned aside his face as he said, in a tone of suppressed emotion—‘I have always considered Mr. Strangeways to be strangely like your father.’

As he spoke, the stranger lifted up his head and fixed his tearful eyes in a yearning gaze upon the face of the girl before him.

Lora glanced again and again from Mr. Strangeways to the miniature she held in front of him. Suddenly she turned deadly pale, and had to lean against the table for support.

The thought that flashed into her mind now became the one fact of life; it was like the insistent sound of a small hammer amidst the crash of surrounding machinery in motion. She felt as if she should go mad if this sad-eyed man before her would not speak one word, but would only gaze upon her with unfathomable longing. Her eyes burned with an intense glow, deeper and more sombre because of the absolute whiteness of her face.

‘How strange!’ she thought. ‘Everything is slipping away from me; I must sing that strange song I heard once—let me see, how did it go?—

“A little way, and an end at last;
The dead soul laughs at sorrow’s blast!”

No, no, that is too sad! Why, I——’

Dr. Steele had been watching Lora. He saw her deathly pallor and the unnatural light in her eyes, and when he witnessed a certain change pass over her face and heard her muttering incoherently, he at once put his arm round her and then whispered in her ear,

‘Lora, don’t lose your control! My dear, be

not afraid—you have guessed the secret, be not fearful as to its truth! I will leave you for a few minutes, but I must not be longer, for *he*, as well as you and I, must play the parts allotted to us in that last act of a long tragedy—that last act of a long tragedy—that last act which upstairs has just reached a crisis.’

As he spoke he passed from the room. His reminder of the scene she had just left, more than his first words, recalled her to herself and enabled her to gain her self-control.

With a swiftness of motion of which a moment or two ago she would have been quite incapable, she gained the side of Hew Armitage. He it was who now seemed almost paralysed, for he only stared at her in the way that a dumb animal will when its human master approaches it with some purpose inscrutable to it.

In another moment the strangeness of the revelation, the dread that came over her, would have prevented these two—father and daughter—from instantaneous recognition of each other’s new-born love. But with a sobbing cry the white-haired man rose to his full height, and,

stretching out his arms, called his daughter's name.

Dr. Steele came quietly into the library again ; for much as he would have preferred to have absented himself longer, he could not do so owing to the necessity of his and the others' presence upstairs. He saw that at last the father had found the daughter whom he had never seen, and the orphan girl a father whom she had loved, but with a love more reverentially sacred than personal. Lora was lying against her father's breast, clasped in his enfolding arms ; down her face streamed tears, half of sorrow for what she saw and knew, half of gladness and new strange joy for the love that had come to her as it were out of the grave.

As for Hew Armitage himself, he seemed to have cast back the heavy burden of age : he stood erect, vigorous, a proud and almost joyous light in his eyes, a smile of transient happiness upon his worn face.

'God bless you, my friend,' cried the old

doctor, in a tremulous voice, manfully striving to hide the tears that dimmed his own sight. ‘Armitage, Hew, this late happiness has at least been vouchsafed to you; you must be brave and strong now to the end. Are you able for the interview with this devil in human shape—this man who has lived in evil as most men flourish in the free air of heaven, who has overshadowed all your life, and who has been an unmitigated curse to all who have come in his way; tell me, are you able to confront him?’

‘Yes, Steele, lead the way. The sooner this thing is done the better. Lora, my darling, you would fain have been merciful, but you knew not with whom you had to deal. To know this man as he really is, is almost enough to stifle all belief in God. Come; I must see this man once more—that it is for the last time, I pray from the depths of my heart.’

When the three reached the first landing, Dr. Steele beckoned them into the small ante-room, in which Mrs. Fyfe had waited for a time, and wherein the detective still sat in readiness for

the moment when his services would be required. Whispering to the latter to come into the drawing-room at the very instant he should be summoned, or if he heard anything like a struggle, Dr. Steele and his companions drew close to the heavy curtains that closed off the ante-room from the drawing-room. Here they could make out all that was said almost as distinctly as if there were no barrier between them at all.

For the first few moments they heard no sound at all save the footsteps of some one impatiently pacing to and fro. Then the voice of Mr. Farquhar was heard, stating that he would wait Miss Armitage's convenience no longer, and that he would at once take his leave.

'Go into the room—be quick,' whispered Dr. Steele, almost shoving Lora from the ante-room.

Duncan had risen to prevent their visitor's departure or to call on the detective, but stood back as Lora came swiftly into the room. Even then the young man wondered what had come over the girl he loved. It seemed as if the past few moments had intensified her

womanhood, had added depth to the beauty which had always been hers, but which was now more striking than ever.

‘Well, Mr. Farquhar—if that is the name you still wish to be known by—I have been detained longer than I had anticipated. However, it will have afforded you all the more time in which to write out the statement, if you have decided to take advantage of my offer.’

‘Curse you and your offer!’ cried the man, his face dark with the fury he could no longer control. ‘I’ve had enough of this nonsense—I defy you and all your friends. I’ve had my turn—ha! ha!—and can afford to let you have yours now. Yes, Madam Lora, I composed the charming document and forged your cursed father’s signature to it; yes, Master Duncan, I did attempt to set Firnie Knowe on fire, and wish to heaven it was now in ashes, along with the mortal remains of the pious Mrs. Fyfe, and the godly young heiress-hunter whom I shut up in the coal-cellar as I would have done a dog. Stop there, Sir John!—I am armed, and will shoot the first person who attempts to

leave this room. After I have left the house, you can put whom you like on my track and catch me, if you can! Before I go, my dear Miss Armitage, I should like to supplement by a little information what you already know concerning your father——’

‘Do not speak to me in that tone, or I will not listen to another word!’

‘Ah, my young friend, Duncan, you see what a high-spirited wife you have before you; I wish you joy, I’m sure. I would have married her myself, whether she willed or no, but that I don’t care for she-devils.’

Duncan sprang forward and dealt Mr. Farquhar a blow that sent him reeling towards the door; but, before the latter could retaliate, Lora had placed herself between them, first telling her lover to restrain himself for her sake, and then adding sternly to her late guardian—

‘Tell me what you have to say, but keep to the point.’

‘Yes, Lora Armitage, I caused your mother some of her bitterest moments. This is, perhaps, the only thing in my life for which I have

the slightest regret ; for, after all, poor Mona was too weak ever to really cross me in anything I had set myself to do. But, in addition to making a tidy little sum out of your father by false pretences, I caused him to leave this country on a wild-goose chase. I met him again at sea when both our vessels had been wrecked, and then through me he suffered the agony of the damned, and all that he went through in Australia and on his hopeless voyage home again was due to your humble servant. This will be a pleasant memory for you to keep of me ! When I found out, on my coming over to this country after close on twenty years’ absence, all concerning Hew Armitage’s having sailed in the *Macedon* from Melbourne, and how that vessel had never been heard of since, I saw where my opportunity was, and took it, with—on the whole—very considerable success, if I may say so.’

‘After what you tell me—inhuman devil that you seem to be—you do not dare to expect that I will show you the slightest mercy—uncle though you be !’

‘I don’t want your mercy, curse you, you young fool! And I tell you this beforehand, that, though I have not the least intention of being caught and brought to what you call justice, I would, rather than incur the certainty of a life-long sentence, shoot myself. No, my young lady, you have seen the last of Edwin Farquhar, but you have not seen the last of me! I will turn up again. It may not be for years; but some time, soon or late, you will have cause to regret more bitterly than you have yet done ever having crossed me! In the meantime—*au revoir!*’

Mr. Farquhar made a low bow as he spoke, but stopped half-way, as if transfixed. His face became as ghastly pale as it had done the night before, when, in the wan light of a street gas-lamp, he had seen what he had at first taken for the apparition of one long dead. His eyes became fixed in a state of horror, and his jaw fell, even as in the case of one stricken some mortal blow, and feeling his life ebbing fast away on the failing breath.

‘The second time!’ he gasped, hoarsely, still

staring wildly at what he saw in the mirror before him—a tall man, with white hair falling down his furrowed face, but with eyes burning with a terrible fury. Then, through the absolute stillness of the room, sounded hollowly a strange voice :

‘ Charles Leith !’ the grave has indeed given up its dead !’

CHAPTER IX.

FOILED.

‘CHARLES LEITH! the grave has indeed given up its dead!’

The words broke the spell of horror which had entranced Mr. Farquhar. Swinging round, he faced the new comer, and in a moment realised that it was no vision he had seen the night before, that it was no apparition of one dead whom he now looked upon, that it was indeed none other than that Hew Armitage whom he had so bitterly wronged.

‘Devil in human shape, why is it that you are for ever coming between the happiness of me and mine—have you not already accomplished sufficient evil? Is there not already upon you

a weight of sin greater than mortal man ever bore before ?’

Even yet Mr. Farquhar—to call him still by the last name under which he was to be known to those in that room—had not recovered sufficient composure to enable him to speak. As he stared at this white-haired man, so like and yet so different from the Hew Armitage whom he had known many years before, the horror passed away from his eyes, and was succeeded by a look of intense fear. This, however, was little more than momentary, for he speedily realised that he had little to fear from the personal wrath of the prematurely aged man before him.

‘So you are not dead after all, Hew Armitage? I suppose you think you have turned up in the nick of time, and scored heavily against me at last, but I may tell you that in any case my game here was played out, and that nothing can undo the past? Do you still miss Mona—do you remember our voyage together in the cutter of the *Australasian*—do you?’

‘Charles Leith, for some mysterious purpose God has allowed you to pass to and fro upon the

earth like a devouring flame, consuming or blighting whatsoever came in your way. But at last the day of your evil prosperity has come to an end ; there are sufficient charges against you to ensure your passing the rest of your days as a convict. My daughter mercifully offered you certain chances, but, even if you had accepted these, I should have felt bound to cancel them, for there is a limit beyond which human forgiveness must not go. Man, have you not one word of regret, of sorrow, to say for all the dreadful evil you have done ?

Mr. Farquhar laughed scornfully.

‘I regret nothing, except perhaps not having made surer of you when I had you in my power in that boat.’

‘Do you realise what is before you—at the best, lifelong imprisonment as a convict, but far more likely weeks of dreadful waiting, to be succeeded by a shameful death at the hands of the hangman ?’

Farquhar started violently, the ashyness coming once more into his lips.

‘What do you mean ? What folly makes you talk like this ?’

‘Have you not heard the thing every news-boy is shouting out—a terrible and mysterious murder in Murray Street?’

‘Well?’

‘The latest account of this I heard just before coming here; the dying man found time to mutter the name of his murderer.’

The paleness spread from Farquhar’s lips throughout his face, and his hand stole furtively beneath his coat-flap.

‘And even at this moment, Charles Leith, a detective waits in the street outside to arrest you the moment you leave this house.’

Then, seeing the surprise depicted on the faces of Lora and Sir John, Hew Armitage added,

‘Yes, this is the man who has added to his long list of crimes by stealing the jewels from your safe, Sir John, and finally murdering his accomplice.’

Despite her loathing for the man before her, Lora could not help a feeling of pity for the sudden abject prostration into which her late guardian sank. It seemed as if that terrible breath of age which comes to us all sooner or later swept over him with its icy touch. He

sank back in the chair from which he had risen, his white hands hanging nervelessly by his side, and the pallor of his face becoming a painful index to the suffering within.

After one or two ineffectual attempts to master himself, he at last, by a great effort, regained his self-control.

‘I see that the game is played out at last,’ he said, rising as he spoke. ‘It is useless for me to say anything, either in extenuation of what I have done or to plead for your mercy. But I can at least make some reparation. Hew Armitage, I cannot give you back the happiness you have lost, but I can tell you a secret—I can tell you something about Mona that will make you happier for the rest of your days. This is a thing between us two, a sacred confidence that no human ear should listen to save your own. It is a matter between the dead and yourself.’

At a sign from Hew Armitage, the others fell back towards the ante-room. All were too excited and too interested to be suspicious. If shrewd old Dr. Steele had been actually in the room, he would almost certainly have so placed

the two men that they were next the curtain that divided the two rooms—as it was, they stood close to the central door.

They saw Farquhar stoop towards his companion and whisper a few words which Mr. Armitage seemed unable to catch. The next moment his arm shot out with something whitely gleaming at the end of it—there was a flash of steely light, and Lora saw her father stagger back with red blood spurting from his shoulder.

Before anyone could cry out—and the deed itself had been so sudden and noiseless that those in the ante-room heard almost nothing of it—Farquhar had hurled back the door, and dashed downstairs with reckless speed.

Within a second or two, however, the quick ear of the detective in the ante-room made him surmise that something had happened, and springing to the top of the stairs, just as cries of consternation came from the drawing-room, he caught sight of the figure of the fugitive rounding the corner of the kitchen passage.

For with that intense quick-wittedness, more characteristic, perhaps, of the animal than of the

human being, Farquhar had formulated in his mind his sole chance of escape. He suspected there was some detective in the house, probably behind those very curtains from which Hew Armitage had issued, and he knew that one awaited him in the street outside. His experience of the night before proved invaluable to him now. He knew the exact way to the laundry at the back of the house, where no window could yet have replaced that which he had so carefully cut away, and the narrow lane at the back of the garden led off into a number of small streets through which he knew his way perfectly.

As he dashed down the kitchen stairs one of the servants bravely but vainly strove to arrest his flight, but with a fierce blow he struck her in the face, and sent her reeling backward half-insensible. In a few moments he had gained the laundry, sprung through the window-frame, mounted the garden wall, and disappeared from sight.

Meanwhile Hew Armitage lay back on a sofa fighting against the swooning weakness that

had come upon him. The wound he had received was a slight one, a stab in the fleshy part of the arm, from which, with care, no evil result might be anticipated. Lora felt far too thankful at her father's escape to feel annoyed, or indeed to think at all about the man who had striven to add another cowardly and useless murder to the list of his many crimes; but her lover and Dr. Steele were furious at the misadventure.

Wearily, but with a light of gladness in his eyes as he looked at the face of his daughter stooping over him, Hew Armitage said, quietly,

‘The shadows of the night have passed away, and now I shall rest in peace waiting for the end.’

CHAPTER X.

THE HAVEN GAINED.

SOME weeks after the escape of Edwin Farquhar—*alias* Charles Leith, *alias* Charles Cameron—for he did escape the most active search, and in spite of the large reward offered for information that should lead to the capture of the murderer—there were signs of great commotion visible at the Ramsays' house in Grant Square.

In the drawing-room were gathered all the family and many friends, and even the invalid Mrs. Maxwell Armitage was able to be present on the couch upon which she had been wheeled in from an adjoining room. The poor woman was experiencing a slow recovery from the shock that had prostrated her, but her mind was now at ease,

owing to the generous stipulations Lora had made concerning her, and upon the fulfilment of which Hew Armitage now also insisted. Dr. Steele was there, looking wonderfully hale and vigorous, despite his great age; and old Mr. Douglas Hannay, who had the appearance of supreme content with himself and things in general, as if, indeed, he had been mainly instrumental in bringing matters to their present happy pass. Not far from him was Mrs. Fyfe, looking quite genial despite her stern features, save when some memory happened to occur to her concerning certain remarks that had been made about her the last time she was in that room. On one such occasion the old lawyer heard her mutter—‘Stole his money, indeed; I would like to know how much *he’s* stole in his time.’

In the centre of the room stood a group of the chief persons interested in what was taking place. Lora, dressed all in white, and looking so lovely that all the old men present felt how aged they were, and yet felt young again in looking continuously at this fresh and exquisite

youthful loveliness, stood a little in advance of Helen and Ethel Ramsay, both dressed in the same manner; and behind them was their mother, looking as stately as was her wont on great occasions—‘a regular Queen Mary,’ as one of her sons enthusiastically remarked. To the left of them was Edward Duncan, very spruce indeed, and looking happier than that light-hearted young artist had appeared for long. Beside him was his friend Gemmell, the young lawyer who had confided to him the secret of the recent manufacture of the paper on which Mr. Farquhar’s document had been written, looking hardly less festive than his friend, beside whom stood also the eldest son of the Ramsay household. Between the two groups stood Sir John and Dr. Steele, and in front of them was Hew Armitage, a glad smile on his face, though old and irremovable sadness still lay deep in his eyes; and by his side stood his trustiest friend of late years, Garth Trendall. In the midst of them all was a tall figure clad in a black robe, the minister, who, according to the Scottish custom, was conduct-

ing the marriage service in the house of the bride's parents or guardians.

For at last Lora's marriage-day had come round, and now the binding words had been uttered, and she and her husband were already man and wife.

What happy weeks these had been since that eventful day which brought a father to her love and saw the absolute discomfiture of her traitorous pseudo-guardian. She had been in a whirl of excitement ever since, but through all she found her deepest pleasure in the company of that poor father to whom her whole heart went out in yearning love. Gradually she learned all his sad story, and she often brought the tears to the eyes of sturdy Garth Trendall by her gratitude to him for all he had done for the castaway whom he had sheltered and otherwise befriended throughout these long years.

Hew Armitage found himself a far richer man than he had formerly been, but it was not without extreme reluctance that he brought himself to visit Firnie Knowe once more. When this first visit was over, however, he felt glad at

the idea that the remainder of his days should be mainly spent in the scene where, if he had suffered much, he had enjoyed the happiest years of his life.

As soon as the young people had gone away southward, Garth Trendall prepared to take his leave also. He felt that his mission with Mr. Strangeways, as he still mostly thought of him, was now at an end; and, moreover, despite the excitement of all that these weeks revealed to him, he began to weary for the beauty and homeliness of his native place. He had taken one long look into the life of cities, and he felt glad and content that his own lot had been cast where it had been. He felt wearied by these great numbers of men, the ceaseless going to and fro, the daily stress of mind under which most people seemed to labour, and he thought restfully of that quiet Cornish fishing-village beneath the rugged cliffs and beside the great sea. And now he felt all the more pleased to return because he was to go back as the minister of Hew Armitage, being empowered by the latter to carry out many of the sanitary, educa-

tional, and pleasure-giving schemes over which the two had often talked in those bygone days when Mr. Strangeways was the 'schoolmaster' of St. Aphra. Then he would have so much to tell his wife and friends, not only about his own experiences—indeed, less about them—but about the man whom one of them, Jasper Polgarth, had so cruelly wronged; and also to prepare what would be, for St. Aphra, a grand ovation on the occasion of the visit to that place of Mr. Strangeways, his daughter, and her husband.

For, after Lora had declared that she had two lovers, an old one and a young one, and that she could not be happy unless she lived with them both, and after it had been arranged that all three were to live at Firnie Knowe in the summer and autumn, and in London during the winter and spring, she had pleaded with Edward that they should return from their honeymoon in Paris by way of Cornwall, should meet her father either in London or Truro, and then proceed with him to St. Aphra. Hew Armitage was only too glad to agree to all this, though he would fain have kept Garth Trendall beside

him, especially after the departure of the two young people.

What a day it was for St. Aphra when it became known that Garth Trendall was back again. The little cottage was besieged by rough, kindly callers to such an extent that the occupant was forcibly reminded of some of those thronged restaurants in the great city at which he had wondered so much. The simple fisher-folk were never tired of hearing the marvellous story of 'their' Mr. Strangeways—and, indeed, for many successive years their late schoolmaster formed the subject of endless conversation, and, it must be added, in course of time, considerable romancing.

But if Trendall's return was a great event, what was it when, one lovely day in the beginning of June, all the fishermen of the place appeared decked out in their very best, when net-mending and all manner of work was put aside, and when at last a waving flag on the Beacon Cliff told them that the look-out had signalled the approach of the carriage coming from Ortho, and containing the three visitors!

When the old-fashioned 'poster' drew up at the top of the steep path that led downward from the cliff to St. Aphra, it was at once surrounded by a score of Trendall's special friends, headed by Garth himself, and the tears came into Hew Armitage's eyes at the genuine warmth of the enthusiastic reception with which he was greeted.

It was indeed a triumphal procession that entered the quiet little village! The good people therein were divided in their affection and pride in their old schoolmaster and in admiration for his beautiful daughter, lovelier than anyone they had ever seen, and dressed in a way that was a revelation to the feminine St. Aphrans. A grand lunch, chiefly consisting of all kinds of fish variously done, was served in the open air, but wine and many other unaccustomed delicacies were there also, provided by Mr. Armitage's foresight. When, in the midst of it, Garth Trendall rose and began a speech, there was absolute silence everywhere, save a child's laugh in the distance, the song of a lark in the blue sky, and the sadly

sweet, monotonous undertone of the calm sea whispering to the land. An eloquent speech it was—a wonderful one all Trendall's fellow-fishermen thought, but it became doubly touching when the speaker referred to all that Mr. Armitage was going to do for the place where he had received shelter and unvarying kindness through so many long years.

Poor Hew Armitage! when he rose to reply he struggled bravely with his increasing emotion, but at last he found it vain to strive any further, and so sank back in his seat after muttering a few words, the tears falling from his eyes. Great was the delight and enthusiastic the admiration, however, when Lora rose up and made the brightest and merriest and happiest little speech possible, concluding with an unmistakably genuine expression of her gratitude to all in St Aphra who had made her father's sojourn in that place so memorably pleasant to him, and especially thanking Garth Trendall, whom, she added, her father loved and admired as it had been his lot to love and admire few men.

Enthusiastic cheers followed for 'Mrs. Duncan,' 'Miss Lora,' 'Miss Lora Armitage,' 'Miss Strangeways,' and 'The daughter o' our school-master,' according to the fancy of those who thus gave vent to their pent-up feelings.

Hew Armitage stayed over-night with the Trendalls, the young couple driving back to Ortho in the lovely moonlight that made the grand Cornish scenery seem so solemnly beautiful. He moved about as if in a dream, revisiting the well-remembered scenes. As he stood in the brilliant moonshine that lit up sea and cliff by the side of the Slice, and saw the tide rippling shoreward, and heard it making a subdued music as it gurgled and lisped among the hollows of the rocks and the softly-swaying seaweed, he found it difficult to realise what had once been there enacted. Nay, more, he found it difficult to realise that his life as Mr. Strangeways had been anything else but a mere dream—an imagined existence.

It was with different feelings indeed that Hew Armitage left St. Aphra this second time; no longer in a torment of terrible memories and

in a tumult of hope and fear, but with a great peace in his heart—a peace that made his deep life-sorrow seem beautiful, even as the afternoon glow will render lovely and strangely solemn one of those sombre Umbrian landscapes, which make much of central Italy so inexpressibly sad.

It was not till three years had passed that word reached Hew Armitage and those dear to him concerning the man who had been the evil genius of his life. The news was sent home by some friend of Edward Duncan. It appeared that Charles Leith—for by some strange perversity he had reassumed a name which one would have thought he would have been careful to absolutely disown—had managed to reach London in safety, and that he remained there for some months, having been able to do this owing to money which he had already deposited there as a precautionary measure. When the time arrived when he thought he could leave England with safety, he crossed to Hamburg, and sailed thence to America. In

New York he remained for some time, soon spent all the money he had, became recklessly dissipated, and began to lose that wonderful quick-wittedness and self-control by which he had so often escaped well-merited punishment, and by which he had been able to accomplish so much evil. At last he was arrested as one of the leaders of a band of skilful forgers, was tried, found guilty, and sentenced to penal servitude for life. He had undergone the prolonged torment of his punishment for about two years, vainly seeking some means of escape, but finding none, till one day there occurred, on the island where the convict establishment was situated, one of those sudden and apparently unpreconceived revolts which all gaolers dread so much. In the scuffle which ensued Leith killed one of the warders, and effected his escape; but two days after he was found lurking among some weedy boulders at the other end of the island. He was very roughly treated, but he had now become sullenly indifferent to all that might happen to him before the certain doom which he knew would be his. A few

weeks later this man, who had so triumphed in his evil-doing, who had wrought incalculable suffering, and had never voluntarily done one good action, at last swung to and fro in the chill grey air of a winter morning—the strong sea-wind not allowing the corpse of the executed convict to rest even in death.

EPILOGUE.

LATE one afternoon, in the full tide of summer, a little girl, herself something between a flower and a bird, ran among the innumerable flowery paths of the beautiful gardens of Firnie Knowe—gardens haunted all day by bees and butterflies, and by hungry thrushes, blackbirds, chaffinches, and even a vagrant rook or two.

An old man, seated on a wicker couch in the balcony, sometimes regarded the setting sun, again affectionately watched the happy little figure in the garden. The latter, as she stooped to shake a bumble-bee out of the bell of a large campanula in which it was drowsily swaying to and fro, caught sight of a young wood-pigeon which had fallen from the nest in the

old yew-tree close beside her. Taking the frightened but unhurt little thing in her hands with a caressing tenderness, she carried it towards the balcony to show it to the white-haired man who was so quietly sitting there in the full glow of the western sky.

‘Oh, look, grandpapa! here’s a little wood-pigeon from the nest in the old yew-tree! Isn’t it a darling little thing? and what a funny wide mouth it has!’

The old man smiled gently, but did not reply.

‘What is it, grandpapa? Are you not well? Don’t you know me, dear grandpapa, that you look at me so? I am your Mona, your own little Mona!’

‘Mona!’ said the old man, dreamily, fixing his rapt gaze on the fawn and purple and gold of the summer sunset; ‘yes, Mona, did you not whisper to me last night; did I not see you descend as a star from heaven, and become the spirit of her whom I love—even of you, whose voice I now hear.’

‘Grandpapa, dear grandpapa!’ cried the

child, in a hushed, awed voice ; for there was something that stilled her strangely—‘ are you not happy ?’

‘ My darling ! Yes, I am happy, oh, so happy !’

From the room within came the sweet strain of a pathetic melody, and softly singing through it breathed Lora’s voice—

‘ There lips shall cling to lips—

There hands clasp hands :

Love shall have no eclipse

In these glad lands.

‘ O Love, so great, so dear,

With glad-eyed Death draw near :

O Death, thou hast no sting—

Death, with the sunlit wing !’

Little Mona thought she felt her grandfather’s soft clasp of her hand tighten a little. Gently she leaned her head against his breast, no longer vaguely distrustful of something beyond her ken. Was it the sunset glow that so irradiated his face for a moment—some reflection of the heavenly gold that shone on those wide-open eyes ? Slowly the strange irradiation passed ; more swiftly the gleam in that fixed gaze died away.

Hew Armitage closed his eyes, and just the

faintest breath fanned Mona's soft cheek. Suddenly a thrush burst into full song, the wild strains thrilling with the singer's ecstasy, and a low breeze crept along the mignonette-bordered pathways, just stirring here and there a fallen blossom or shell-like rose-leaf.

THE END.

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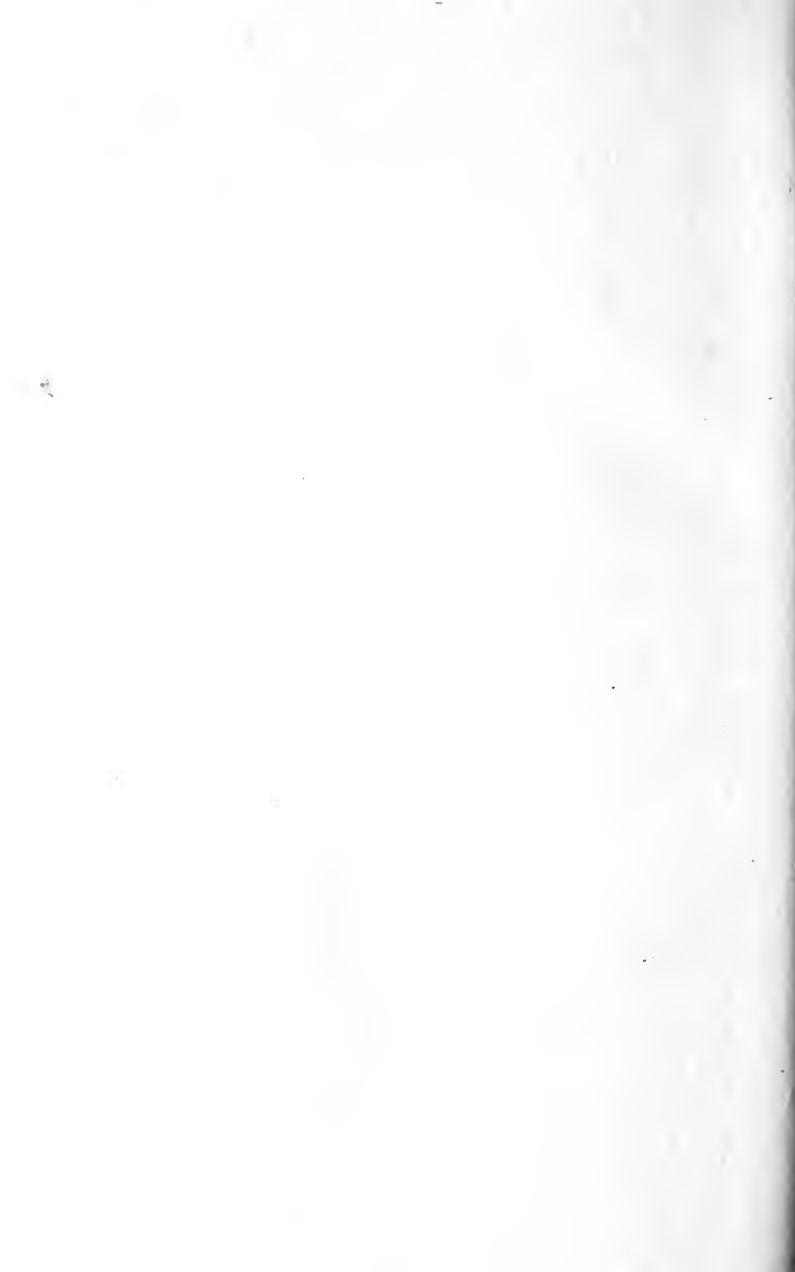
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